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### Toward a More Wholly Communion: Cultivating Ecological Enlightenment and Sustainable Action in Christians

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Department of Environmental Studies

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE PAGE

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**TOWARD A MORE WHOLLY COMMUNION: CULTIVATING ECOLOGICAL  
ENLIGHTENMENT AND SUSTAINABLE ACTION IN CHRISTIANS**

presented by Cary Hauptman Gaunt

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**TOWARD A MORE WHOLLY COMMUNION:  
CULTIVATING ECOLOGICAL ENLIGHTENMENT AND SUSTAINABLE ACTION IN  
CHRISTIANS**

By

Cary Hauptman Gaunt

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Environmental Studies

at the

Antioch University New England

(2009)

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## DEDICATION

To the vernal pool that is the heart of my Vermont home and to all the beings that depend on it. After more than two years of dedicated effort, we lost the battle to protect this vital life source and many more like it. Beginning in early June 2009, important natural habitats were destroyed or irreparably damaged along a 51-mile wild corridor stretching from Brattleboro to Cavendish, Vermont as utility companies doubled the size of the existing transmission corridor using outmoded approaches. Despite innumerable reports indicating the expansion is *not* necessary, or could be addressed with innovative alternatives, the “Old Story” prevailed. Sadly, this is a pattern repeated around the globe at such a rapid pace it is impossible to track. “My” vernal pool is indicative of all the lost and degraded lands and waters of this world and the Sacred Mystery that sources everything. I dedicate my work and my heart to them. In the words of Thomas Berry, "The natural world is the larger sacred community to which we belong. To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence" (Berry, 1990).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This dissertation is about the journeys of others, yet my research inquiry prompted my own transformational journey. As you will read in the stories comprising this dissertation, most journeyers were aided by others along the way. This was certainly my experience as I tracked the sustainability pathways of each role model profiled in my study and reflected on my own journey to a more ecologically whole, restored, and sustainable way of life; I was blessed by many allies and guides. It would be far too much to mention everyone, so I offer a universal thank you from my heart and hope all my supporters will feel recognized through my prayer of gratitude.

I was profoundly moved and inspired by each role model included in my study and I offer a special thank you to each of them. Their stories touched me deeply and whenever the going got tough during the long days and nights of data analysis and writing, I would take a break to listen to the interviews again. Hearing the role model voices and bearing witness to the depth of their commitment and reflective capacities inspired and renewed me repeatedly. Written words cannot reflect the depths to which I was touched by their journeys—they are true role models and I am transformed.

Several significant life experiences and participation with supportive and soulful communities over the course of my Ph.D. supported my personal reflections and deep transformation. These included three personal vision quests and numerous other extended nature-based spiritual formation and earth literacy programs; extensive vision quest/Rites of Passage guide training through the School of Lost Borders; multi-year engagement with the Animas Valley Institute's Soulcentric Apprenticeship and Initiation Program; active participation in the New England Centering Prayer community; and the reflective practices comprising the early

phases of the Antioch University New England Environmental Studies Ph.D. program. Further, I have been blessed to co-guide and assist on some of these offerings, especially the contemporary wilderness vision quest. To each of my co-guides and all the participants I extend special thanks; you've touched me in deep ways.

Each member of my Dissertation Committee supported me in different ways on this journey. My advisor Mitch Thomashow provided precious pearls of wisdom and insight on ecological identity development and the overall concept and framing of this work. He also helped me through some periods of writer's block by sharing insights on his own writing process; this was invaluable. Steve Guerriaro provided foundational support, warmth, encouragement, peace, strength, and much joy from my interactions with him. Importantly, Steve really stepped up and held a significant role in guiding me through this whole process as my only local committee member. Steve's own research on ecumenism provided valuable insights for me in understanding so many aspects of my research. Perhaps most importantly, our shared love of Holy Mystery provided kinship and communion—those conversations were a great gift. Heidi Watts provided great reality checks, wisdom, and good humor. She was a rock and a joy to have on my committee. Lastly, Betsy Perluss, my outside reader and good friend, offered great insights on human transformation through her lens of a depth psychologist. I learned a tremendous amount from Betsy during this process. She graciously fielded my extensive questions about transformational psychology and human development and more importantly, listened patiently to my laments about certain aspects of the dissertation process.

Jean Amaral, Antioch's reference librarian extraordinaire, deserves special mention. She is simply a joy to work with and so tremendously patient and helpful to students. Often, I found myself drawn to the library to work because I knew her positive energy and supportive spirit

would lift me out of a research and writing funk and provide new hope and vigor. This is a tremendous gift to students and I am abundantly thankful for Jean's presence at Antioch.

A colleague and dear friend, Moira Schoen, also deserves special mention and highest accolades. More than anyone, Moira kept me going. There were many times this entire process felt too overwhelming, too isolating, and too time consuming. Moira supported me with encouraging words, but even more so, with action. She painstakingly reviewed all my coding and later provided a thorough edit of my entire dissertation. Her support of this project and to me is a precious gift that I will hold in my heart forever; I remain deeply touched. I've had the honor of knowing and working with Moira professionally since the mid-1990s. My hope is that we will continue to collaborate for many years to come. Her support on my dissertation was vital and I am grateful beyond words.

Moira provided essential human support and my dog Lucy provided a different kind of support and companionship. She kept me real and sane during this often isolating research and writing process. Simply put, Lucy was by my side for the duration. Lucy is my soul mate and reminds me of life beyond the dissertation. Everyday she'd remind me to take walks in nature, to throw the ball and play, and, of course, to eat.

I conclude my acknowledgements by honoring all the special natural places around my home that fed me spiritually during this journey—the vernal pools, swamps, and streams; magical wild cranberry bog; numerous wildlife tracks and dens; wild songbirds; meandering trails; and the hilltop meadow I call Monadnock View. I understand in my heart and soul the meaning of sanctuary. To all the beings and the Sacred Source of everything—you infuse and encompass me. Without you, I am nothing. We are one. This I know in my bones and my prayer moving forward is to increasingly align my actions with this great Love.

# **TOWARD A MORE WHOLLY COMMUNION: CULTIVATING ECOLOGICAL ENLIGHTENMENT AND SUSTAINABLE ACTION IN CHRISTIANS**

Cary Hauptman Gaunt

Under the supervision of Mitchell Thomashow

At the Antioch University New England

Keene, NH

Increasingly, environmental, scientific, and religious organizations and leaders are calling for people of faith to wake up to the global climate and other environmental crises and step up their ecological responsibility by leading more sustainable lives. Yet only a few seem to hear the calls and even fewer are responding in substantive ways. Many have commented on the gap between the religious theory for environmental care and the actual practice of living ecologically sustainable lives. Exploring how to bridge this gap is increasingly important as environmental regulatory, policy, and technology efforts fall short of goals and environmental professionals, including regulators, managers, and scientists, call for ways to “cultivate the [ecologically] enlightened citizen” (Boesch and Greer, 2003).

My research addresses the gap through a grounded theory analysis of the sustainability journeys and formation processes of Christian role models of ecological enlightenment who demonstrate commitment to a sustainable way of life. The individuals profiled in my study not only heard the calls for a new way, but are responding whole-heartedly with intention and discipline and are guiding others toward a new ecological era. I conducted in-depth interviews with 10 adult Christian men and women role models about their personal pathways to ecological enlightenment, commitment to sustainability, and the role of spiritual/religious practices in this

transformation. Initial research participants were discovered through the literature and/or nominated by academic and professional experts of religion, spirituality, and sustainability. Additional candidates emerged through theoretical sampling protocols.

By focusing on factors contributing to the ecological formation and/or conversion of these role models, I provide insights on how some people are actually able to “walk the talk” of environmental sustainability despite immense social and cultural pressures to do otherwise. Each role model’s individual story is presented and common themes shared among the stories are identified, focusing on the importance of transformational experiences and journeys, enlarged perceptions, holistic service, faith and practice, community, and grace and will. I weave these themes into recommendations for others seeking to embody sustainability at a personal level and for environmental professionals desiring to develop new approaches to address the underlying causes of unsustainable human behavior.

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*We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future.*

. . .

*As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. . . . This requires a change of mind and heart.*

. . .

*Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.*

*(Excerpts from the Earth Charter that frame my dissertation.)*

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

*“We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future.”*  
(Earth Charter)

On December 12, 2008, much of New England woke to an icy embrace—“shivering”, “paralyzed”, and “crippled” were how the local and national newspapers described it. Like over a million others, I lost power and telephone service, the life lines and tethers that connect my home to the country’s vast electrical and telecommunications grid. Most of the night before a persistent wind strained trees laden with layer upon layer of ice accumulated from almost a full day of freezing rain. It was impossible to sleep as branches of every size creaked, groaned and snapped; whole trees fell with house shaking booms.

Dawn gradually illuminated a magical yet terrible scene. From the smallest blade of meadow grass fronting my Vermont home to the distant view of Putney Mountain about 12 miles north, the entire landscape dazzled as the rising sun broke through lingering clouds and grew brighter. The almost inch thick layer of ice covering every blade, stem, branch and bough sparkled more brilliantly than fine cut crystal reflecting direct light. Yet the glitter belied image-shattering damage. Most notable were five mature white birches that are the hallmarks of my property, so graceful in their reach to the sky that every visitor comments on their beautiful form. Now, they were tattered with branches strewn and large limbs snapped off or left dangling; two of the trees were completely topped, their canopies broken. When the magnitude of that view sunk in, I realized that the landscape of my material home was forever changed.

As I stood outside staring in disbelief and grief at the destruction, I realized the devastated landscape surrounding me was symbolic of the dazzling and broken landscape of an unsustainable way of living. I imagined each breaking branch and toppling tree mirroring different aspects of the presently collapsing systems that define the landscape of the “American Dream.” Just as the ice gripped birches, pines, maples and hemlocks, news of a rapidly deepening economic crisis gripped the media and public psyche. Even newspaper headlines were similar: “Ice Storm Paralyzes Parts of New England” while “Economic Fears Paralyze Wall Street” and “Ice Storm Cripples Parts of Northeast” not long after the “Historic November Job Loss is Newest Evidence of Crippled Economy.”<sup>i</sup>

Not just the economy is challenged these days. Practically every system is groaning under the weight of unsustainable growth, mismanagement, old-school thinking, lack of visionary planning, narrow perspectives, rigid self-interest and greed. I could imagine one layer of ice representing an outmoded energy system based on dwindling fossil fuels; another for sprawling real estate development that obliterates human and natural communities; one more for industrial food systems that deplete fertile soils and ruin waterways; still another for automobile-focused transportation that chokes roads, lungs, and the atmosphere. Each layer built upon the other as the storm progressed until the underlying structures failed.

In his prophetic book *Deep Economy*, environmental writer Bill McKibben begins with two birds, “More and Better roosted on the same branch” (p. 1). The branch could hold both of them for most of human history until the rampant excesses of “More” became a weight too heavy to bear. Now, he writes, “Better has flown a few trees over to make her nest. That changes everything...you have to choose between them. It’s More *or* Better” (McKibben, 2007, p. 1). With this analogy, he describes the “critical moment” where the United States and the world are

standing. Even though most today are obsessed with the collapsing economy, it is but one of many symptoms of a larger planetary peril. The natural infrastructure, whether climate, water resources, habitats and ecosystems, top soil—the living earth in its entirety—is collapsing in places and showing signs of breaking in others.

In the words of the international *Earth Charter*, “we stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future.” This critical moment is one where we are poised, as a society and as individuals, at a crossroads offering diverging pathways. One way moves toward a more life-sustaining future and the other remains tied to an ecologically destructive past. We feel the tension of this choice point at all levels of society.

Environmental programs around the world know this place well. Many environmental restoration and preservation planning efforts are initiated with a visioning process where participants imagine a desired future and define restoration goals. It is easy to envision sustainable futures where humans live lightly on the earth and threatened ecosystems are returned to health.

But any long-time environmental professional knows “the way to hell is paved with good intentions” and moving from vision to implementation is a difficult, if not impossible, task. Too often well intended plans, regulations, education initiatives, and technological approaches fall short of achieving desired goals. When this repeatedly happens, program managers and staff are left pondering, “What next?” Over and over the answer to, “what next” includes new ideas for how to modify and improve the range of existing approaches but also highlights the foundational problem of individual choices and lifestyles. Yes, the systems are flawed, but they are supported and encouraged by a compliant populace.

This “critical moment” when “humanity must choose its future” is a moment that touches each of us. We can rely, as many do, for others to address the problems. Or, we can take personal initiative to change our ways. This dissertation is about individuals who are role models of a new way.

Furthermore, this dissertation hones in on people of faith. Increasingly, environmental, scientific, and religious organizations and leaders are calling for people of faith to “wake up” to the global climate and other environmental crises and “step up” to their faith-based ecological responsibilities to lead more sustainable lives<sup>ii</sup>. The environmental crisis is often considered a spiritual crisis and “a religious question, a question of moral choice and spiritual values...more fundamentally than it is a scientific, economic, or political question” (Carroll, 2004, p. 14).

Preeminent eco-theologian Sallie McFague says, “The planetary agenda cannot be an avocation, something one does in addition to one’s everyday work—a pastime or hobby, as it were—but needs to be one’s vocation, one’s central calling” (McFague, 1992, p. 47). In a new book, internationally renowned Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hanh calls for “a kind of collective awakening” that will arise “when we combine our concern for the planet with spiritual practice” to create an alternative dream to the unsustainable “American Dream” being emulated around the world (Nhat Hahn, excerpted in *Shambhala Sun*, 2008, p. 48). This “American Dream,” encapsulated by some theologians and psychologists as the pursuit of possessions, prestige, power, attractiveness, achievement, affluence, and relationships (Borg, 2003; May, 1991; Rohr, 1994) is the favorite food of that never satisfied bird “More.”

At a time when many are calling, far fewer are responding to the calls in substantive ways: “There are among us men and women who are awakened, but it’s not enough; the masses are still sleeping” (Nhat Hahn, excerpted in *Shambhala Sun*, 2008, p. 48). For my research, I

sought out a few of the awakened ones who not only heard the calls but are responding wholeheartedly with intention and discipline. These individuals are role models of an ecologically sustainable way of life and they are guiding others toward a new ecological era.

I focus my present inquiry on Christians for many reasons, but hope this is a first step in a larger, interreligious dialogue. The challenge to embody and enact the Great Work (Berry, 1999) must include every person and every facet of society. For the dissertation, I needed to apply a narrow focus, so followed the wise counsel of spiritual teachers to “look deeply into your culture and tradition” where “you will discover many beautiful spiritual values” (Nhat Hanh, 2001, p. 132). Like so many in this country, I was raised in a Christian household and Christian perspectives, especially the contemplative and mystical paths, are central to my spirituality.

Several other reasons supported my focus on Christianity: (1) the paucity of practical academic research that explores the relationship between Christianity and sustainability (Gardner and Stern, 2002); (2) the extreme range of opinions that exist today about the potential for Christianity to either help or hurt environmental causes (Hendricks, 2006; Hessel and Ruether, 2000; Tucker and Grim, 1994); and (3) the far-reach of Christianity in the United States—78 percent of people self-identify as Christian (Pew Forum on Religion and the Public Life, 2008).

Ever since historian Lynn White (1967) implicated the Christian church as providing “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis,” Christian theologians, scholars, religious leaders, and lay people have been responding to his assertions and laying the groundwork for Christian-based ethical concern for the environment. Countless scholarly works, conferences, and popular publications have explored sacred texts and other religious sources to establish a strong and credible foundation for ecological sustainability. Many of these are described through the comprehensive *Forum on Religion and Ecology* (see <http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/>)

and two comprehensive surveys of the field by Forum Co-Director and scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker (2003 and 2006). A mainstream *Green Bible* recently was published by Harper Collins (Maudlin and Baer, 2008). Innumerable organizations, church-led policy efforts, congregational projects, and other efforts have emerged as a result of this call. Many of these were celebrated at a national conference in February 2008 at Yale Divinity School. *Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism* brought together faith leaders from all traditions to celebrate accomplishments and look deeply for what still needs to be done. Clearly, all faiths have done much to increase their focus on and response to the environmental crisis.

Despite this good work, scholars and environmental, science and religious leaders note a continued disconnect between the religious theory for environmental care and the actual practice of living ecologically sustainable lives. This disconnect appears to exist in two main ways:

- Disconnect in the academic literature and research
- Disconnect in the capacity of humans to reconcile the “gap between theory and practice, between ideas and action” (Tucker, 2003, p. 23).

My dissertation research directly addresses these two disconnects and looks at the role of religion and spirituality in affecting sustainable behavior. I focus on Christian role models who align ideas and actions and “let their lives speak” of a sustainable way. A grounded theory analysis of in-depth interviews with these role models presents overarching descriptions of each person’s journey to a sustainable way of life and identifies trail markers and stepping stones along the way.

This research is part of my personal response to the calls I repeatedly heard during my twenty-some years as an environmental policy and watershed planning consultant: “We must cultivate the [ecologically] enlightened citizen.” This emphatic statement was routinely followed

by a qualifying comment something along the lines of “but we do not really know how and we are not doing a good job of addressing individual behavior as part of the mix of restoration approaches”<sup>iii</sup>. My research goal was to trace the origins of and seek to understand the pathways comprising the sustainability journeys of these role models. Further, I sought to learn what nurtures and supports them in deepening their embodied commitment to environmentally responsible living despite immense social and cultural pressures to do otherwise.

This critical crossroads moment is a time of great opportunity. Thomas Berry, Catholic priest, cultural historian and self-professed geologist and cosmologist Brian Swimme remind us that the creation of the universe was marked by times of chaos and turbulence, of seeming catastrophe, that birthed periods of immense creativity—moments of “cosmological grace” (Swimme and Berry, 1994). We are at one of these moments. This critical crossroads time is considered by many a time of the “Great Turning” (Macy and Brown, 1998; Korten, 2007) where despair exists with hope, where the well-worn path of an old way is opening to a “road less traveled.” It is being noticed at all walks of society and was highlighted in President Barak Obama’s historic inaugural speech (2009):

That we are in the midst of crisis is now well understood. ... Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and they are many. They will not be met easily or in a short space of time. But know this, America—they will be met. On this day, we gather because we have chosen hope over fear, unity of purpose over conflict and discord. On this day, we come to proclaim an end to the petty grievances and false promises, the recriminations and worn out dogmas, that for far too long have strangled our politics. We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation; the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

Whether you call it the “critical moment,” the “Great Turning,” or a “new era of responsibility”<sup>iv</sup> we are at a crossroads and change is happening and must happen at all levels.

Moving toward the more sustainable future called for by leaders representing the full spectrum of American life fundamentally involves a shift in consciousness, a shift in worldview, and a shift to a new way of being in the world. Traditions of faith have a vital role in framing and guiding the new way. Obama identified “the source of our confidence” as having a basis in faith: “the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny.” It is the Great Work (Berry, 1999) of our time.

In her opening remarks for the *Renewing Hope* conference, Sallie McFague drew from her recent book, *A New Climate for Theology* (2008), to make the case for ecological theologies and anthropologies. Her book underscores the “spiritual” source for the environmental and climate crisis and she contends that “[w]e already know more than enough about the disaster ahead of us—having more knowledge (or technology) will not solve the problem. Only changing human wills can do so” (McFague 2008 p. 31). By addressing the deep questions asked by theology and anthropology—knowledge of “who God is” and “who we are” and changing those basic assumptions, McFague asserts “our behavior may change as well” (McFague 2008 p. 32).

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The potential for religion and spirituality to transform lives and cultivate ecologically enlightened and sustainable citizens is theoretically outlined in a rich collection of academic, theological, and popular literature (described more in Chapter 2 of this dissertation). Many science, environmental and religious leaders and organizations are compelling religious institutions and people of faith to play a larger role in crafting an ecologically responsible and sustainable way of being. As so many note, however, there remains a gap in the capacity of most people (even those ethically committed to sustainability) to “walk the talk” of ecologically

responsible lives<sup>v</sup>. This gap between theory and praxis is an area ripe for research. Very few studies have sought to understand how, if at all, engagement in religious and/or spiritual practices affects ones' interest in and capacity to live sustainably. The academic research exploring the lives of contemporary ecologically conscious Christians who are committed to a sustainable way of life is limited. The literature that does exist is valuable and growing, but thus far has focused primarily on case studies of religious communities that are trying to embrace sustainability or profiles of ecologically minded religious leaders (Carroll, 2004; Taylor, 1999 and 2007; Bingham, 2009; Moseley et al., 2009). I was unable to find a single study that rigorously mined the words and experiences of Christians to develop a theory of how they were able to move from ideas and words to sustainable actions.

My dissertation addresses this research gap by exploring the following overarching research questions:

- 1) How do ecologically enlightened Christians, committed to a sustainable way of life, come to be that way—how are they formed?
- 2) What factors influenced their transformation towards ecological consciousness and commitment to sustainability? How were they able to move from theory to praxis?
- 3) What role, if any, did spiritual practice(s) and/or religion have in supporting this formation?
- 4) What clues might the formative journeys of these role models provide in developing a preliminary theory and recommendations for improved means of supporting the development of ecological enlightenment and sustainability practice among people of faith?

By interviewing engaged Christians actually “walking the talk” of ecological sustainability, my dissertation research provides information relevant to moving the discourse from theological reflection to practice. I used the grounded theory methodology of qualitative research to analyze responses to a series of interview questions.

## RESEARCH IMPORTANCE

It is disappointing and alarming to many that even after decades of effort, global environmental conditions continue to decline and threats to our natural world appear to be relentless and expanding. These challenges are well documented and are blamed on many sources. Yet, a closer look often indicates that the root of many of today's environmental challenges derives from, either directly or indirectly, unsustainable systems and the human consumer behaviors and lifestyles that encourage and emerge from them. Renowned Buddhist Monk and spiritual teacher Thich Nhat Hahn suggests that we are tied to an unsustainable system that "imposes itself on us, and we have become its slaves and victims. Most of us, in order to have a house, a car, a refrigerator, a TV, and so on, must sacrifice our time and our lives in exchange. We are constantly under the pressure of time" [and we have sacrificed a] "serene and spiritual atmosphere" (Nhat Hahn, excerpted in *Shambhala Sun*, 2008, p. 48). Nhat Hahn reminds us that in our daily rushing about "we are so caught up in our own immediate problems that we cannot afford to be aware of what is going on with the rest of the human family or our planet Earth" (Nhat Hahn, excerpted in *Shambhala Sun*, 2008, p. 48). Instead, we end up mindlessly pursuing the "American Dream." Signing a petition for change is not enough; "it is time for each of us to wake up and take action in our own lives" (Nhat Hahn, excerpted in *Shambhala Sun*, 2008, p. 48).

Historic and current responses to the environmental crisis have tended to focus on "outer" measures spanning science, economics, policy, education and communication arenas (including regulatory development, comprehensive and strategic planning, cost-benefit analysis, program evaluation, ecological monitoring, computer modeling, public outreach, and environmental mediation), while practically ignoring the "inner" realm of personal decision making and the

influence of disciplines like religion, spirituality, psychology, and philosophy in shaping ones' environmental views and actions. These externally focused measures simply do not go far enough in addressing many of the foundational causes of environmental problems. Increasingly voices from scientific, environmental, and religious perspectives are calling for a new way. Summarizing her call for new ecological theologies and anthropologies, McFague writes "it is not simply an issue of management; rather, it demands a paradigm shift in who we think we are" (McFague, 2008, p. 44).

It takes a great deal of courage and effort to change paths and to choose the least traveled road. Yet many, across all levels of society, are doing so. Others are struggling, seeking guidance on the next step. Within the Christian community, there is a rich collection of theoretical and theological literature framing the ecological responsibilities of Christians. There are action statements, letters, and policy documents from practically every branch of Christianity calling for ecological conversion, stepped up environmental responsibility, creation care, and stewardship. But there is a dearth of studies about those who actually succeed in reducing their ecological footprints. Chapter 2 summarizes the range of religious calls for environmental action by reviewing recent literature and summarizing some of the most significant efforts.

This dissertation highlights the stories of some who do. It falls in line with a growing number of books showcasing examples, whether organizations, communities, or individuals who are pioneers of the new way (Bingham, 2009; Carroll, 2004; Hawken, 2007; Korten, 2007; Kingsolver, 2007; McKibben, 2005 and 2007; Moseley, 2009; Taylor, 2007). Only four of these studies highlight people of faith (Bingham, 2009; Carroll, 2004; Moseley, 2009; Taylor, 2007) and for the most part, none of them explore the process of becoming sustainable. My work fills

that gap and explores the unique perspectives and pathways people of Christian faith may embrace in order to adopt more sustainable ways of living.

By focusing on Christians my research directly responds to what eco-theologian Sallie McFague calls the “hole in the center of Christianity’s environmental ethic” (McFague, 2000, p. 39) and provides guidance for many adherents wanting to embrace the numerous calls for ecological awakening, conversion, and environmentally responsible living. McFague contends this is not a “theological or Christological hole. It is a hole created by centuries of indifference, ignorance, and destruction of nature” (McFague, 2000, p. 39). The tide is changing, however, and more and more spiritual and religious organizations and people are seeking ways to embrace an ethic of “creation care.” There remains, however, “frequently a disjunction between principles and practices” (Tucker, 2002) and “the task now is to embody in praxis the ecological Christologies that have been developing over the last several decades” (McFague, 2000, p. 39). In other words, the hole in the center is filling, but more needs to be done to “reacquaint” people with nature and to provide concrete ideas on how to put theory into practice (McFague, 2002, p. 39).

While not discounting the negative roles certain religious people and institutions have exerted in the world, “in fostering wars, in ignoring racial and social injustice, and in promoting unequal gender relations” (Tucker and Grim, 2000, p. xx), religion also offers the potential to heal. Its role in shaping peoples’ worldviews, providing moral authority and educating about values, transforming lives, and establishing strong social and financial networks to achieve beneficial ends is well documented (Gardner, 2002). Environmentally and religiously focused people often share mutual goals (e.g., opposition to excess consumption). To attain these goals,

however, bridges must be built and strengthened. By exploring the journeys of Christian people of faith embracing sustainability, my hope is to contribute to this connection.

## **THE PLAN OF THIS DISSERTATION**

Five additional chapters and extensive appendices comprise the remainder of my dissertation. Most of the content explores the sustainability journeys of role models comprising my study. I provide a summary of each role model's individual story and identify common themes shared among the stories. An extensive literature review provides the foundation, frames the context, and supports my interpretations and analyses throughout.

Chapter 2: "Crossroads and Confluence" elaborates on themes alluded to in the "Introduction" by describing more clearly what is meant by a critical crossroads moment, discussing historical trails bringing us to this moment, and illustrating alternative pathways forward. In particular, the chapter presents the role of religion, specifically Christianity, in supporting and forging more ecologically enlightened and sustainable ways. It summarizes the growing confluence of calls from religious, environmental, and science leaders and organizations for people of faith to become more environmentally responsible. The chapter identifies the kinds of sustainability actions that are being called for and uses these to develop a sustainability framework that guided my research and helped me identify role models. The concept of ecological enlightenment is framed and the chapter addresses how the calls for action can be seen in the context of "cultivating the ecologically enlightened citizen." I describe in this chapter more clearly why this is a religious and spiritual issue and present a literature review of the academic work addressing this topic. Specifically, I identify research gaps and how my work is pointed at filling those gaps.

My approach to this research is summarized in Chapter 3: “Methodology: Learning From Those Who Have Gone Before.” This standard academic methodology chapter presents my rationale for using a grounded theory method and summarizes my approach to data collection and analysis. I describe how I went about finding research participants, interviewing them, and then making sense of the extensive and information-rich interviews. This chapter also provides the first demographic snapshot of each research participant. Data limitations and various data quality issues also are identified.

Chapter 4: “Role Model Profiles: Journeying to a Sustainable Way of Life” provides a detailed profile of each research participant based on their interview and supplemental materials where applicable. The profiles focus on each person’s unique journey, highlighting responses to the open-ended interview question, “Tell me about your journey towards and commitment to an ecologically enlightened and sustainable way of life.” These bibliographic portraits identify how their journeys started and unfolded once they began. The portraits also provide examples of how the role models are living out their ecological commitments in the world today. It presents the profiles in the context of a hero/heroine’s journey (Campbell, 1973). The chapter concludes with a brief summary and sets the stage for the broader results discussion in Chapter 5.

Many of the experiences that started these Christian role models on their sustainability paths are similar to what influenced others who have turned to the earth and are relatively well documented in the academic literature (e.g., Degenhardt, 2002; Dowdall, 1998; Judkins, 2004; Schauffler, 2003; Scherch, 1997; Vickers, 2003). Rather than address in detail factors sufficiently documented elsewhere, I offer a summary of their applicability to my research participants at the conclusion of Chapter 4. The essence of my work, synthesized in Chapter 5,

focuses on perspectives and pathways that are unique to Christians and that are not well reported in the literature.

Chapter 5 presents the analyzed results of my work. “The Unique Perspectives and Pathways of Christian Sustainability Role Models” explores some of the factors and sustainability journey themes emerging from my research that are unique to the Christian role models comprising this study. Though unique to the ten role models considered herein, the grounded theory method with its emphasis on theoretical sampling and saturation enables broader application and interpretation of these themes. This chapter explores the themes of transformational journey, alignment and integrity, stages and types of faith, spiritual and religious practice, perception and worldview, discernment, service, struggle and temptation, forgiveness and non-judgment, community, and grace. The following thematic sections comprise this chapter; each describes a facet of the role models’ journeys to a more ecologically enlightened and sustainable way of life, including how they were:

- Transformed on the journey
- Enlarged in perception
- Focused with intention to serve the Whole (i.e., responding to “calls within calls”—ecological *and* religious calls)
- Guided by faith and practice
- Building and nurturing community: You can’t do it alone
- Infused with Grace and personal conviction.

The ground is prepared and seeds of ecological enlightenment and action are sown in many ways. Each person’s journey is uniquely theirs. However, the sustainability seeds for each of the people profiled in this dissertation eventually germinated, resulting in a conscious,

intentional commitment to live a different way. For many of these role models this seemed to indicate a shift to a deeper, more mature, level of spiritual development (Fowler, 1995). They reached a crossroads and set off in a new direction so they could align their lives and their actions to support sustainability.

In Chapter 6: “Returning to the Confluence: Conclusions and Next Steps,” the final chapter of this dissertation, I return to the confluence by pulling together various aspects of my research in order to offer a series of recommendations. The chapter starts by summarizing key findings from the research. Many common threads shared among the role models emerged from my research and in this chapter I lace them together as a preliminary theory on how ecological enlightenment and sustainable action can be cultivated in people of faith. This chapter highlights particularly important themes, challenges and opportunities for Christians such as the vital role of faith and spiritual practice, the limited contribution of institutional religions in supporting ones’ turn to sustainability, the need for a “healthy spirituality,” the importance of partnerships between the environmental and religious communities, and the importance of community overall. As appropriate, I integrate literature on the stages of faith development and how my findings track with those results. Finally, I put on my consultant’s hat and discuss how my research results could support environmental and religious organizations in reaching out to people and places of faith and developing more effective ways of addressing environmental sustainability.

## CHAPTER 2: CROSSROADS AND CONFLUENCE

“West Virginia, Open for Business” was the welcome sign slogan that greeted me a couple years ago as I drove into the state on a personal pilgrimage to find the source of the Potomac River, the watershed of my youth and early adulthood. Even though I presently live in Vermont, my first 40 years were spent within the Potomac River basin. Initially I inhabited its rural western reaches but eventually migrated east toward Washington, DC, landing in the northern Virginia suburbs.

I knew West Virginia well, having grown up on a small Virginia farm only about 10 miles from the border. Once I moved to the metropolitan area, I often fled west to the wild Appalachian Highlands, making many border crossings on my way to Canaan Valley, Dolly Sods, Seneca Rocks, and other natural areas for which West Virginia is famous. All that time, I both knew and appreciated the state as “Wild, Wonderful West Virginia.” It was therefore astonishing and dismaying to see the change in state slogan when I journeyed there in May 2007, especially given what I knew about West Virginia’s position at the epicenter of the mountain top coal removal controversy. This economically efficient, yet socially and environmentally catastrophic, form of mining deep coal seams literally blows off mountain summits and fills adjacent valleys with toxic debris. Described by some as a crime against nature, a crime against God’s Creation<sup>vi</sup>, this mostly illegal practice continues in large measure through the “unwavering” support of “West Virginia’s political establishment” (McQuaid, 2009, para. 40)—the same people who changed the state logo.

In Chapter 1 of this dissertation I began framing the “critical moment in Earth’s history” that prompted creation of the international *Earth Charter* (and many similar efforts described in

this Chapter) calling it a moment “where we are poised as a society and as individuals at a crossroads offering diverging pathways.” When I crossed the West Virginia border in 2007, I found myself wondering at what critical moment the state had turned from an identity that embraced the wild to one declaring it was “Open for Business.” Further, I was curious how the stories underlying the state’s cultural identity were shifting to allow such a dramatic change in state slogan. The transformation of West Virginia’s slogan from pride in natural beauty to an appeal for business development seemed symbolic of the critical moment identified in the *Earth Charter* as “a time when humanity must choose its future.” The “sheer audacity” (McQuaid, 2009, para. 13) of mountain top coal removal that threatens to permanently destroy hundreds of thousands of acres of lush forest, wetlands, aquatic habitats, ancient landscapes, world-famous topography, renowned recreation areas, an emerging and promising ecotourism economy, whole communities and individual lives represents one kind of choice.

In this chapter, I continue to frame the critical crossroads moment and briefly explore the pathways that brought us here. I then turn away from the crossroads toward the confluence. After centuries of unsustainable choices at all levels of society placed us at the crossroads, new ideas, urgencies, and calls for action are coming together at a confluence. In particular, I explore the confluence of religion and science as sourcing a new way. This chapter concludes with a call for “cultivating the [ecologically] enlightened citizen.”

## **CROSSROADS: THE STORIES OF DIVERGING PATHS**

Mountain top removal in West Virginia is but one example of how humanity has turned toward a less sustainable future. There are so many other examples it is staggering to contemplate them and yet we must. Two major international research efforts, the Millennium

Ecosystem Assessment (2005) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007), synthesize prevailing scientific research to paint dire portraits of a collapsing natural infrastructure. Consider these stark words from the comprehensive Millennium Assessment: “Human activity is putting such a strain on the natural functions of Earth that the ability of the planet’s ecosystems to sustain future generations can no longer be taken for granted” (p. 5).

We arrived at this place from many origins. Each moment of each day we find ourselves at the crossroads every time we must choose between two or more different ways. It happens at all levels of society: personal, family, community, state, region, watershed, bioregion, and nation. And the crossroads occurs for the smallest decisions about what a person chooses to eat and drink to the largest—how the nation plans its energy future, how we develop our towns and cities, and how we fuel our vehicles and heat our homes.

The issues are complex and the pathways exceedingly complicated to navigate as the author of a recent *Smithsonian* article on mountaintop coal removal noted. When he was home writing his article, he discovered that the “glowing letters” of his laptop in suburban Washington, DC were “traceable to mountain top removal:”

Coal torn from a West Virginia mountain was put on a truck and then a rail car, which took it to Alexandria [Virginia], where it was incinerated, creating the heat that drove the turbines that generated the electricity that enabled me to document concerns about the destruction of that very same American landscape (McQuaid, 2009, para. 6).

In a small book entitled *Stuff: The Secret Life of Everyday Things*, authors John Ryan and Alan Durning (1997) further illuminate the tangled web behind some of our most basic choices, from the morning coffee and newspaper to the computers we use at home and work. Other environmental writers have recently explored food pathways and other far-flung journeys of a growth economy (McKibben, 2007; Pollan, 2006; Wessels, 2006). By tracing the convoluted yet

well-worn pathways leading to this critical moment, each author presented ideas and options for a new way.

Even those of us who care deeply enough for the earth to work toward environmental restoration and preservation consciously and unconsciously act in ways contradictory to our professed care. Janisse Ray, environmental writer and activist called environmentalists to task in a probing article addressing the question, “Are we being change, or are we just talking about change?” Most of us fall short, she asserts when challenging “us to raise the bar for ourselves” after noting how she and many peers “turn to fossil fuels to keep the house above sixty degrees” on the coldest days, “drive vehicles that consume fossil fuels,” and make other unsustainable choices from housing to accepting plastic bags at the farm stand (Ray, 2008, p. 60). To “be change” and lead in a new direction requires conscious effort and deliberate choices—deep discernment—and even with this commitment it is often hard to know which way to turn.

Professor John Carroll asks:

Can true sustainability, for example, be based on a foundation of nonrenewable natural resources such as fossil fuels? . . . Can true sustainability be based on an energy intensive profligate wasteful lifestyle such as the world has never seen before? . . . Can true sustainability be based on a value system which, at best, concerns itself with miles per gallon in a motor vehicle but never questions how or for what purposed a vehicle is being used, who or what it is transporting and why? . . . Can true sustainability be related to a consumptive lifestyle that seems to know no limit (and refuses to consider any concept of limits), a lifestyle predicated on growth for its own sake (the disease of ‘growthism,’ which is what unrestrained capitalism is all about) (Carroll, 2004, p. 1)?

In short, everything we do, every choice we make, has impacts well beyond our immediate boundaries. For example, much grocery store food is shipped from all around the world. Timber and other materials for our homes may be clear-cut or mined from countless locales but rarely nearby and rarely sustainably. There is an intricate and almost impossible to follow web of source extraction points, transportation networks, and manufacturing processes

that comprises each and every good we use, unless we get them directly from the source or nearby (such as carrots from our garden or broccoli at the local farmer's market). The ecological footprint attempts to identify and place boundaries around that web, capturing the full life cycle of products and actions.

Initially conceived by William Rees and Mathis Wackernagel (1998) at the University of British Columbia and the organization Redefining Progress in Oakland, California, the ecological footprint is being used and modified by an increasing number of people today (Beatley, 2000; Merkel, 2003; Sleeth, 2006). It provides a mathematical representation of the amount of land and water needed to meet our housing, energy, food, and other resource needs. An ecological footprint quiz asks questions about the types of food we eat and where it comes from; housing preferences and size; transportation choices and extent; and the kinds of material goods purchased. Taking and scoring a personal ecological footprint quiz can be a humbling experience and definitely pinpoints how each choice potentially affects the environment.

Compared to the rest of the world, North Americans have a very high ecological footprint, averaging 24 acres per person (Merkel, 2003, p. 93). Our closest allies in the United Kingdom use about half the resources we do (12 acres per citizen) and most of the rest of the world consumes far less (Venetoulis et al., 2004). Merkel calculates there are only 4.7 biologically productive acres per person (Merkel, 2003, p.67). Clearly, the North American demand is far more than the planet is able to sustain. Even though these are general statistics developed from a computer model, they point to a large discrepancy between what we are using versus what is available. The exact discrepancy varies from place to place and person to person—statistics correlate higher incomes with larger ecological footprints, for example (Merkel, 2003, p. 84). No matter how it is analyzed, however, the data show that we are living

beyond the earth's ability to support us and we are actively engaged in "ecological deficit spending" (Merkel, 2003). It is this way of being that leads to the critical moment identified in the *Earth Charter*.

There is palpable tension and confusion at this moment. This choice point of diverging paths is emerging near the apparent end of the long and robust biological and historical journey of the Cenozoic era (Swimme and Berry, 1994). This likely end<sup>vii</sup> is largely wrought from human-induced catastrophic global environmental degradation and the crossroads is a place of struggle between differing worldviews. Thomas Berry suggests our current troubles relate to the stories by which we live our lives:

We are in-between stories. The Old Story—the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it—sustained us for a long time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, energized action, consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, and guided education. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. But now it is no longer functioning properly, and we have not yet learned the New Story" (Berry, 1978).

The Old Story retains a firm grip on many. The future plot is yet to be revealed, although hints of possible new story lines are emerging.

Consider, again, the issue of mountain top coal removal in West Virginia. In his recent expose' on the subject, journalist McQuaid provides an example of these contrasting ways by honing in on the tiny town of Ansted. There, a mining project is "dismantling the backside of Gauley Mountain, the town's signature topographical feature." Responses to the project indicate "two competing visions for Appalachia's future," two competing story lines. One seeks to hang onto an old way, an old identity and cultural story—"coal mining, West Virginia's most hallowed industry." The other indicates a new way, "tourism, its most promising emerging business, which is growing at about three times the rate of the mining industry statewide." The

Mayor of Ansted, with the backing of the town, envisions a trail system that will connect two national rivers in the area, enabling hunting, fishing, biking, and hiking (McQuaid, 2009, paras. 4, 9 and 10). The Gauley Mountaintop removal project places in jeopardy these hopes for a new way and a new story.

Places and people at all corners of the globe, in Appalachia, in the Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River basins and far beyond, are experiencing these kinds of seemingly contradictory choices. I am mired in one now as utilities in Vermont seek a historic expansion of the electric grid while rural towns, residents, and state legislators desire moderation and further study to explore demand-side management, energy efficiency, “Smart Grid” technologies, and alternative sources. While it is tempting to label one perspective as the old and unsustainable way and the opposite view as the new and sustainable one, these issues are rarely clear cut, with matters such as economics, social justice, and technology connected and intertwined like a Gordian knot.

Nevertheless, some commentators have portrayed key characteristics of the two predominant worldviews and ways. These are helpful to explore as context for the present critical moment and choices for the future. The seemingly divergent ways are described alternatively as the Technozoic versus Ecozoic Eras (Swimme and Berry, 1994; Berry, 1999); Empire versus Earth Community (Korten, 2006); Industrial Growth Society versus Life-sustaining Society (Macy and Brown, 1998); growth economy versus deep economy (McKibben, 2007), modern capitalism versus transforming capitalism (Speth, 2008); egocentric versus eco-soulcentric (Plotkin, 2008); or paradigm of progress versus myth of progress (Wessels, 2006). Regardless of what they call them, the commentators identify similar characteristics for each distinct pathway.

The Technozoic, Empire, Industrial Growth path is considered by these sources to be the way of our old and current story. It often denies or downplays the emerging scientific consensus about global environmental change and deterioration and promotes an enduring commitment to the industrial-commercial growth economy. The world is viewed as a collection of objects that are used to support and fuel a materialistic, consumerist system (Berry, 1999). This system succeeds through an anthropocentric worldview, individualistic anthropology (McFague, 2008), competitive spirit, and a “dominator hierarchy” (Korten, 2006).

In a recent comprehensive review of modern capitalism and environmentalism, scholar, environmental leader and present Dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Gus Speth identifies the dilemma at the center. Modern capitalism, he acknowledges, is “very good at generating growth” through “a powerful drive to earn profits, invest them, [and] innovate.” However, these factors often “work together to produce an economic and political reality that is highly destructive of the environment” (Speth, 2008, p. 7). The old and current story is described by Speth as one based on:

An unquestioning society-wide commitment to economic growth at almost any cost; enormous investment in technologies designed with little regard for the environment; powerful corporate interests whose overriding objective is to grow by generating profit, including profit from avoiding the environmental costs they create; markets that systematically fail to recognize environmental costs unless corrected by government; government that is subservient to corporate interests and the growth imperative; rampant consumerism spurred by a worshipping of novelty and by sophisticated advertising; economic activity so large in scale that its impacts alter the fundamental biophysical operations of the planet (pp. 7-8).

These factors combine to “deliver an ever-growing world economy that is undermining the planet’s ability to sustain life” (p. 8).

This is the pathway described in McKibben (2007) and Wessels (2006) as being a fairy tale or myth. Specifically, McKibben identifies three “challenges” that indicate the fairy tale “magic can run out:”

One is political: growth, at least as we now create it, is producing more inequality than prosperity, more insecurity than progress. . . . [T]he second argument draws on physics and chemistry as much as on economics; it is the basic objection that we do not have the energy needed to keep the magic going [nor, he adds, can we deal with the pollution]. . . . The third argument is both less obvious and even more basic: *growth is no longer making us happy* (p. 11).

Wessels (2006) reviews the science of sustainability to unveil “the myth of progress.” In his systematic assessment of “the laws of sustainability” that provide the basis for the “complex systems” of the natural world, Wessels explores the limitations of a “linear, reductionist paradigm” (p.19), the realities of ecological carrying capacities, the ignorance many have of the first and second laws of thermodynamics, and the loss of diversity as principle reasons our present way is unsustainable.

The alternative pathway, or new story, seeks a “mutually enhancing human presence upon the Earth” (Swimme and Berry, 1994, p. 250) and is characterized by more cooperation and partnership; social justice where the rights of all are defended; community focus and wider intention to serve the greater whole; and an awareness of our obligation to future generations (Berry, 1999; Korten, 2006). The potential for this alternative is reviewed by many commentators<sup>viii</sup>. Guiding attributes of the Ecozoic Era and Earth Community are captured in the vision and language of the international *Earth Charter* (See Appendix A). Berry (1991) identified critical principles for an Ecozoic Era:

1. The Universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. . . .
2. The Earth exists, and can survive, only in its integral functioning. . . .

3. The Earth is a one-time endowment. ...
4. The Earth is primary and humans are derivative. ...
5. There is a single Earth community. There is no such thing as a human community in any manner separate from the Earth community. ...
6. We understand fully and respond effectively to our own human role in this new era. For while the Cenozoic Era unfolded in its full splendor entirely apart from any role fulfilled by the human, almost nothing of major significance is likely to happen in the Ecozoic Era that humans will not be involved in (paragraphs 27, 32, 33, 35, 37, 51).

He later augmented these principles with additional guidelines: “Twelve Principles for Understanding the Universe” and “Ten Principles for Jurisprudence Revision” (Berry, 2006).

Collectively, these suggest the new consciousness and new way will be one where people have a greater understanding of the story of their origins, and from that will better know their place in communion with the natural world in a more coherent and mutually enhancing way. Essential in his thinking is the principle that, “The universe is composed of subjects to be communed with, not primarily of objects to be used. As a subject, each component of the universe is capable of having rights” (Berry, 2006, p. 149).

Speth also helps us to envision the alternative paths at the crossroads and indicates the ecologically enlightened direction. By synthesizing numerous sources he describes “the values and worldview that are needed . . . [by identifying] the transitions that are required to move successfully from today to tomorrow”:

- From seeing humanity as something apart from nature, transcending and dominating it, to seeing ourselves as part of nature . . . ;
- From seeing nature in strictly utilitarian terms . . . to seeing the natural world as having both intrinsic value independent of people and rights that create the duty of ecological stewardship;
- From discounting the future . . . to empowering future generations . . . ;

- From hyperindividualism, narcissism, and social isolation to powerful community bonds . . . ;
- From parochialism, sexism, prejudice, and ethnocentrism to tolerance, cultural diversity, and human rights;
- From materialism, consumerism, getting, the primacy of possessions, and limitless hedonism to personal and family relationships, leisure play, experiencing nature, spirituality, giving, and living within limits;
- From gross economic, social, political inequality to equity, justice, solidarity. (p. 207).

Achieving the vision of the Ecozoic Era and the equitable, “partnership narrative” (Korten, 2006) and “common destiny” of “one” Earth Community (*Earth Charter*, 2000) is the “Great Work” (Berry, 1999) of our time: “to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner” (Berry, 1999, p. 10). To achieve this, Berry (1999) highlights the “fourfold wisdom” of indigenous peoples, women, classical traditions, and science.

In calling upon indigenous wisdom, Berry honors their historically intimate connection with nature, reverence for future generations, and importance of “sacred personalities” (e.g., elders, chiefs, and shamans) in fostering and teaching sustainable living and an “integral human presence to the Earth” (Berry, 1999, p. 180). The wisdom of women acknowledges the harm of “patriarchal domination” and calls for “mutual nurturance” drawing from the Goddess tradition and other matriarchal approaches.

While maintaining a skeptical attitude toward many of the classical traditions, especially Christianity, Berry also acknowledges that the pathway to a new Ecozoic era must include wisdom from the sacred texts of the world’s major religions. These were developed from “revelatory experiences of a spiritual realm both transcendent to and immanent in the visible

world about us and in the capacity of humans to participate in that world to achieve the fullness of their own mode of being” (Berry, 1999, p. 185). The collections of scripture, commentaries, narratives, and other writings that have emerged over the millennia to address this transcendent and immanent force provide important reflections and theories to consider in an emerging Ecozoic consciousness because the original authors were actively seeking to understand “the numinous forces moving throughout the universe and their guidance of human affairs in all life circumstances” (Berry, 1999, p. 187). Berry also identifies:

five models of positive relationship to land which have developed through Christian history: the *animate* model of the Celtic period, the *custodial* model of the Benedictine period, the *fraternal* model of St. Francis, the *fertility* model presented by Hildegard of Bingen and the *integral* model brought to us by Teilhard de Chardin (Berry as cited in interview with Didcoct, 1984).

Berry’s reverence for the wisdom of science is directly related to his work with Brian Swimme in developing the “Universe Story,” the underlying foundation for most of his beliefs and works (Swimme and Berry, 1994). Sciences from the realms of ecology to physics are demonstrating more and more definitively the concept of an evolving universe of which humans are an integral, interconnected part. Science is providing insights on three key components of an Ecozoic view: unity of the universe, emergent nature of the universe, and the existence of human intelligence as an integral component of the universe (Berry, 1999, pp. 190-193). The challenge for humanity in the Ecozoic Era is to “move from this abiding spatial context of personal identity to a sense of identity with an emergent universe.” Berry acknowledges this is a transition that has “not been accomplished in any comprehensive manner by any of the world’s spiritual traditions” (Berry, 1999, p. 190).

Berry presents the four-fold wisdoms as providing the way to human and universe restoration, where all beings are part of a “single community of existence.” These wisdoms provide the foundation for building an Ecozoic Era. Berry (1999) concludes:

The distorted dream of an industrial technological paradise is being replaced by the more viable dream of a mutually enhancing human presence within an ever-renewing organic-based earth community. The dream drives the action. In the larger cultural context the dream becomes the myth that both guides and drives the action (p. 201).

Augmenting Berry’s focus on the fourfold wisdom is Speth’s (2008) vision of “transformative capitalism.” His emphasis on economics broadens the “Great Work” into the market place to address a “post-growth society” by modifying consumption patterns, reforming corporate dynamics, and promoting a new consciousness and a new politics.

Many of these authors (Speth, 2008; Berry, 1991, 1999; Plotkin, 2008; Korten, 2006) agree that making the kinds of changes demanded for this new way requires a new/transformed consciousness. This topic is taken up later in this chapter.

Standing at the crossroads today we might ponder how we arrived at such a “critical moment.” Looking back, we see there are many pathways, each having a unique origin and way of meandering through the terrain. Each person, community, and culture has its own way, yet there is common ground underlying most of the paths—guides identify certain anthropological, psychological, religious, scientific, technological, philosophical, and economic perspectives as providing the foundation and motivation for many of today’s unsustainable ways. It is helpful to look back at some of the tracks that led us here in order to orient ourselves for the next steps forward. The issues are infinitely complex, like a trail through overgrown and tangled brambles, but signs remain and some converge to make a fairly strong trail.

### **Anthropological, Religious, and Psychological Sources**

In the United States, most of us are guided by an “individualistic anthropology” where “the rights to personal pleasure and gain are taken for granted” and “the assumption is that individual human beings must take responsibility for themselves” (McFague, 2008, pp. 43-44). Environmental writer Bill McKibben notes that “three quarters of Americans believe the Bible teaches that ‘God helps those who help themselves’” even though this “uber-American idea” forming the “core of our current individualistic politics and culture” never appears in scripture but instead is attributed to Benjamin Franklin (McKibben, 2005, p. 31). He considers it a “Christian paradox”—somehow we got turned around, embracing a “counter-biblical” way that forgets Jesus’ “radical summons to love of neighbor” (p. 31). Evangelical leader Jim Wallis quotes theologian Ched Myers to suggest that we got turned around by “powerful Enlightenment ideologies of positivism, capitalism, and rationalism that first challenged, then deconstructed, and eventually eclipsed the biblical tradition, replacing it with the heroic myth of Progress” (as cited in Wallis, 2008, p.138). When this happened, Wallis suggests, we forgot “our interdependence with nature” and “changed to our domination over it” (p. 138).

Many suggest the roots of this individualistic anthropology and dominator culture trace to even deeper Christian biblical interpretations that contributed mightily (but perhaps falsely) to these perspectives (White, 1967; Nash, 1967 and 1989; Merchant, 2007; Kearns, 2004). In their original intent, biblical teachings of the Hebrew and New Testament bible offer guideposts for a sustainable and just way of being (DeWitt, 1994 and 2008; McFague, 2008; Sleeth, M., 2006 and 2008). Yet they have been misused or misinterpreted to suggest positions antithetical to the core Christian value of “love thy neighbor as thyself” (McKibben, 2005; McFague 2008; Wallis, 2008).

In particular, certain words used in the biblical creation story of Genesis, especially the concepts of having dominion over the “living things” and the call to subdue the earth are pointed to repeatedly as the “roots of the ecological crisis” (Kearns, 2004; White, 1967). While it is impossible to review the plethora of material devoted to these concepts it is useful to examine Kearns’s (2004) detailed summary of the “two contradictory and contrasting Genesis creation stories” that comprise “the roots of very different understandings of the human/nature relationship.”

The first chapter of Genesis (Priestly or P account) offers the language that has been studied and interpreted/reinterpreted countless ways for different ends:

<sup>27</sup>So God created humankind in his image,  
In the image of God he created them;  
Male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup>God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Genesis 1:27-28; as cited in Kearns, 2004).

Many have pointed to verse 28 as God’s commandment to use and control the earth. This chapter “presents a remote God who appears to create *ex nihilo* [“out of nothing”];” a God that is disconnected from the creation. Further, by creating humans last, in order that they may have “dominion over” suggests creation is incomplete until humans are created “at the top of the hierarchy” (Kearns, 2004, p. 467).

The second chapter of Genesis presents another account (Yahwist or J) where God is more intimate, forming “*adam*, or human-earth creature, out of *adamah*, the dust and clay of the earth” (Kearns, 2004, p. 467). In this chapter, “Adam is presented as insufficient until he is joined both by the living beings, from plants to animals, and then by Eve, or woman” (Kearns, 2004, p. 467). Here, humans are to “till and keep” the garden. This is often used to promote a

stewardship ethic in contrast to the first, which sets up a dominion theology. In practice, the dominion theology is often twisted to indicate a domination position that “ends up appearing to justify the neglect and even exploitation of the environment” (Wallis, 2008, p. 136).

This tendency to reference Genesis 1 to promote domination of nature is long-standing one, deeply rooted in the psyche of western Christian cultures. Consider the words of early New England Puritan settler John Winthrop (as cited in Merchant, 2007):

Before Winthrop’s ship, the *Arabella*, left England, Winthrop noted the reasons for migrating: “The whole earth is the Lord’s garden,” he said, and quoted God’s instruction in Genesis 1:28 “to increase, multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it.” This verse gave the colonists permission to subdue nature (p. 28).

This same interpretation led to a later declaration of “Manifest Destiny” as colonists spread westward and made their domination over the lands and indigenous peoples complete (Nash, 1967).

A dominion/dominator theology linked to one interpretation of the Creation story has rightly been named as providing some of the anthropological and psychological underpinnings of today’s critical crossroads moment. This theological perspective, that so many contemporary religious leaders and theologians have come to see as faulty (DeWitt, 1994; Hessel and Ruether, eds., 2000; McFague, 2008; Wallis, 2008; Sleeth, 2006), is the one historian Lynn White identified in his watershed essay *The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis*. There he pointedly suggested that “Christianity...not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends” (White, 1967, p. 3).

Throughout history the words of many great spiritual texts like the Bible have been misused to promote selfish human ends. There are countless contemporary examples of this as fundamentalists co-opt the wisdom teachings to promote their unholy political agendas (Wallis,

2005 and 2008). Fundamentalist Christian perspectives are identified by McDaniel (2002), McKibben (2005), and Wallis (2005) as “part of the problem, not part of the solution” (McDaniel, 2002, p. 1461). Called by Hendricks (2006) the “unholy alliance” and lambasted by self-professed Christian environmental writer Bill McKibben (2005) as people who have “highjacked” Jesus to promote “a series of causes that do not reflect his teaching,” the neo-conservatives represent a minority of the Christian community, but receive a great deal of attention although on environmental issues their voice is losing some of its control (Wallis, 2005 and 2008). They remain tenacious and Kearns (2004) identifies ongoing challenges to eco-theology, many of which relate to this earlier and more conservative paradigm:

dualistic thinking and the persistence of viewing humans and nature as separate; transcendent theocentric, or God-centered, theologies that fear embodiment and the earth, and the related fear of paganism or immanent understandings of God; the tensions between religion and science; the lack of scientific literacy in general, and the distrust and yet reliance on science for knowledge and problem-solving; the connection of nature with threat, darkness, and irrationality, or the romanticization of nature into the cute and cuddly; and the huge gap between changing how we think and changing how we then act” (p. 480).

Even today, despite international consensus on the reality and severity of global warming (IPCC, 2007), a conservative group rallying behind the name Cornwall Alliance continues to refute sound science on global climate change, calling “man-made global warming . . . speculative.” This group actively seeks to undermine the 2008 *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action* initiative sponsored by many leading evangelicals and was instrumental in forcing Reverend Richard Cizik, voted by *Grist* magazine as one of the top 15 religious environmental leaders (*Grist*, 2007), to step down as Vice President of Governmental Affairs of the National Association of Evangelicals<sup>ix</sup>.

These kinds of “false conventional views of God and ourselves” . . . “permit the continuing destruction of our planet and its inhabitants” (McFague, 2008, p. 31). Further, some Christians have looked at an “end times” theology that diminishes care for the earth because it is seen as “merely a way station to heaven,” a “temporal, throwaway resource” on the path to eternal life (Wallis, 2008, p. 137). Images of God also contribute (McFague, 2008):

If I imagine God (deep down) to be a super-being, residing somewhere above and apart from the world, who created and judges the world but otherwise is absent from it, then I will conduct my affairs largely without day-to-day concern about God. If the God I believe in is supernatural, transcendent, and only occasionally interested in the world, then this God is not a factor in my daily actions (p.31).

How we view our relationship to the ecological world and our commitment to a sustainable way of life often relates to the fundamental assumptions of “who we are and who God is” (McFague, 2008, p. 30). Theologian Marcus Borg (2003) identifies many of the viewpoints contributing to an unsustainable way as belonging to an earlier understanding of Christianity that “makes little or no sense” to many Christians today. This earlier Christian paradigm considers the Bible to be “a divine product with divine authority” that is to be interpreted literally and factually to reveal “doctrine and morals” about “what to believe or do to be saved” for an “afterlife” (Borg, 2003, p. 15). Those beliefs and values, coupled with the “traditional creation-providence story” that promotes “God’s power over divine love, God’s transcendence over divine immanence; God’s distance from the world over God’s involvement in it” (McFague, 2008, p. 63) wove together in the psyches of our culture to create stories promoting individualism and an unsustainable way of living on earth.

Today, however, contemporary science is helping us remake these stories in the context of an emerging universe (Swimme and Berry, 1994). In order to turn from unsustainable ways and the anthropocentric anthropology underlying them to a more cosmocentric and sustainable

way we need a “New Story” (Swimme and Berry; 1994; Berry, 1999), a “*functional* creation story” (McFague, 2008, p. 49). Others suggest we need to rediscover and reappropriate earlier stories (e.g., the Genesis Story) (Wallis, 2008; DeWitt, 2008). Remaking and revisioning creation stories and biblical teachings is “not sentimental nature worship” but “recognition of the three contexts in which Christian theology has been and should be done. They are the cosmological, the political, and the psychological: the earth as a whole, the world of human oppression, and the inner life of the individual” (McFague, 2008, p.49). It’s a rebalancing from the “cult of individualism” that has taken hold since the “Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment” to incorporate ecological literacy and care of creation, as well as care for others. This restores a more “fundamental and functional anthropology: one that sees human life embedded in and dependent on the world in which we live” (McFague, 2008, p. 49).

In her extensive review, Kearns (2004) agrees with the predominant scholarly thought that names the period from 1500-1700 as critical: “Most scholars, however, view the scientific, industrial, theological, and cultural revolutions of the period . . . as particularly crucial in understanding the modern world-view” (p. 469). In her detailed survey of these influences, Kearns highlights changes in agriculture and other technologies, economic and social conditions, scientific discoveries, the Protestant Reformation, and Enlightenment thought (Kearns, 2004). She references Merchant (1980) who argued, “the result of this wide scope of change was the disintegration of a more immanent and organic view of nature, and the ascendancy of the modern, mechanistic world-view that sees nature as dead, or inert, and atomized” (as cited in Kearns, 2004, p.469). This shift created a deeply engrained psychology: “As a complex result of these changes, the view of nature as disorderly and threatening, whether as wilderness or as

human ‘nature,’ became dominant” (Kearns, 2004, p. 469). Nature, whether “inner” or “outer,” was something to be tamed (Kearns, 2004).

### **Philosophical and Scientific Sources**

Some of the philosophical and scientific shifts marked by Kearns (2004) and enumerated by others (e.g., Berry, 1999; Wessels, 2006) are often attributed to Rene DesCartes. Prominent in the early seventeenth century, his mechanistic view of the natural world “[m]ore than any other scientist at the time . . . changed the paradigmatic nature of Western science—from Aristotle’s holistic view to a reductionist, linear view that focused on the parts rather than the whole” (Wessels, 2006, p. 6). This perspective “desouled the world” (Berry, 2006, p. 26) by establishing “an absolute separation of the spiritual and material worlds” (Berry, 1999, p. 103).

While it is common to blame DesCartes, he was one of several scientists and philosophers who contributed to this paradigm shift. For example, Wessels (2006) points out that Sir Isaac Newton “codified linear science with his study of mechanics” (p. 6). These viewpoints were appropriate in some applications and helped to advance some branches of science, but were inadequate to address the “complex natural systems that surround us—biological, geological, meteorological—as well as human-generated systems, such as an economy” (Wessels, p. 7). However, they became firmly planted in the Western psyche and became the dominant perspective to the detriment of the natural world: “A cosmological sense of reverence for natural processes in medieval Europe was gradually lost with the rise of science and its objective analysis of nature” (Berry, 2006, p. 93). This “mechanistic view of the world encouraged the growth of technological invention and industrial plundering” in an effort to “achieve human

well-being in a consumer society by subduing the spontaneities of the natural world with human manipulation” (Berry, 1999, pp. 103-104).

### **Economic Sources**

These foundational religious, anthropological, philosophical, and scientific premises and even deeper psychologies set the groundwork for an unsustainable economic system. In *Deep Economy*, McKibben introduces us to the two birds, “More and Better.” The old and present story, at least since the early eighteenth century, has been pursuit of more and better. They “roosted on the same branch” singing of the “dogged pursuit of maximum economic production” (McKibben, 2007, p. 1). To keep the song going, these birds had to be continually fed by individuals pursuing their own interests; what theologians and psychologists consider the “three A’s” of “attractiveness, achievement, and affluence” (Borg, 2003, p. 190), “power, pride, and possessions” (Rohr, 1994, p. 145), and “possessions, power, and relationships” (May, 1991, p. 34), with little regard for where and how these pursuits were sourced or what the impacts were along the way.

Like a perpetual motion machine, “the invention of the *idea* of economic growth”<sup>x</sup> (McKibben, 2007) swirled with the rise in corporate power (Berry, 1999; Korten, 2001; Speth, 2008), psychologically sophisticated advertising (Kaner and Gomes, 1995) and psycho-spiritual hunger (Borg, 2003; DeGraff et al., 2001; Keating, 1996; May, 1991; Plotkin, 2003 and 2008) to create the unsustainable place we are today. This path is one ecologist Tom Wessels considers inherently unsustainable: “As an ecologist, it’s evident to me that economic growth, as well as its associated ever-increasing extraction of resources and waste generation, is primarily responsible for the environmental problems that we are witnessing today” (Wessels, 2006, p. xv). This

attitude was considered by economist E.F. Schumacher (1973) in his environmental classic *Small is Beautiful* as a kind of madness:

An attitude to life which seeks fulfillment in the single-minded pursuit of wealth—in short, materialism—does not fit into this world, because it contains within itself no limiting principle, while the environment in which it is placed is strictly limited... (pp. 29-30) If human vices such as greed and envy are systematically cultivated, the inevitable result is nothing less than a collapse of intelligence... (Schumacher, p. 31).

### **Technological Sources**

Enabling economic growth theories to take hold and take off were parallel technological advances. McKibben indicates technological developments of the Industrial Revolution, principally the 1712 invention of the “first practical steam engine” as marking the “first decisive turning point of human history” (McKibben, 2008, pp. 4-5). Thomas Berry identifies numerous technological “ages”, especially the “Petrochemical Age,” as exerting a huge influence on the “human-Earth process” (Berry, 2006, p. 87). The petrochemical age allowed other influential periods to unfold: the Space Age, the Television Age, the Computer Age, the Age of Transnational Corporations, the Age of the United Nations, and the Age of Scientific Technologies; so much has changed since the first oil well was sunk in Pennsylvania in 1859 (Berry, 2006, p. 87). With technology came “serious pollution costs” from an array of interconnected factors: the displacement of earlier products with less environmentally sound new products, invention of plastics and other synthetic materials, the invention of technologies that enabled the global population to “soar” and per capita “rates of resource and energy consumption” to take off (Wessels, 2006, p. 36).

## Summary

It is well beyond the scope of this dissertation to document all the sources contributing to our presently degraded environment and ecologically unsustainable way of living. The attributed causes are many and complex; the results increasingly clear. Many have attempted to document these factors (Berry, 1999; McKibben, 2007, Speth, 2008; Wessels, 2006). In particular, cultural historian Thomas Berry spent much of his career evaluating the “Old Story” and developing reflections on where we have been and where we need to go. In doing so, he identified “six transcendences that have made us vulnerable” to “forms of development” that contributed to “our present devastation of the Earth” (Berry, 2006, p. 25). It is worth reviewing these as a summary of the central factors contributing to the “old” way and story (the emphases are Berry’s; Berry, 2006, pp. 25-27):

- Belief in a “*transcendent, personal, monotheistic creative deity*” that tended to “desacralize the phenomenal world”
- Belief in the “*spiritual nature of the human*” but holding that “the natural world is material”, an “external objective reality that can be dealt with only in subservience to that high spiritual reality for which all things exist”
- Belief in “*redemption*” that “tells us we are not for this world”
- Belief in the “*transcendence of mind*” over matter—“Descartes desouled the world”
- Belief in a “*transcendent technology*” that “allows us to transcend the basic biological law that every species should have opposed species or conditions that limit each species so that no one species could overwhelm the others;” with this transcendence human “are able to surpass natural limits”
- Belief in a “*transcendent historical destiny*” that provides a “sense that our destiny is in some other world.”

## **CONFLUENCE: RELIGION AND SCIENCE CALL FOR A NEW WAY**

After wandering myriad pathways for several hundred years—lost in the wilderness of unsustainable choices—we arrive at today’s critical moment. We actually arrived earlier, and many have commented on and studied our predicament, but like so many that are lost, we keep wandering and become even further turned around.

Increasingly, voices from myriad disciplines are beginning to sound in agreement about the predicament we are in. In particular, voices from science and religious realms are arriving at a confluence of opinion. Religions are entering “their ecological phase” (Tucker, 2003) and sciences are reaching out to and collaborating with religious organizations and people (Wilson, 2006; Tucker, 2003).

### **Religions Respond**

Ever since historian Lynn White implicated the Christian church as providing “The Historical Roots of the Ecological Crisis” (White, 1967), theologians, scholars, religious leaders, and lay people have been responding to his assertions and laying the groundwork for religious-based ethical concern for the environment (Kearns, 1996 and 2004; Kinsley, 1996; Nash, 1996; Tucker, 2002, 2003, and 2006). Countless scholarly works, conferences, and popular publications have explored Wisdom literature like the *Bible*, and other religious sources, to establish a strong and credible theological foundation for ecological sustainability. Kearns (2004) and Tucker (2003) provide succinct, yet thorough, histories of the movement. A number of compendia summarize the range of discourse on topics of spirituality, religion, and ecological responsibility and sustainable behavior, each offering a slightly different perspective.

Barnhill and Gottlieb (2001); Gottlieb (1996); Rockefeller and Elder (1992); and Tucker and Grim (1994) provide comprehensive interfaith perspectives. Carroll, Brockelman, and Westfall, eds. (1997); Hessel and Ruether, eds. (2000); LaChance and Carroll (1994); and Schut, ed. (1999, 2002, and 2008) focus primarily on Christian and Catholic theology and historical examples (e.g., Jesus, various saints) as providing the foundation for ecological responsibility. Webb (1998) compiled a series of interviews with key religious and spiritual leaders across faith perspectives, discussing the general topic of environmental concern and responsibility. The comprehensive handbooks, *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature* (Taylor et al., 2005) and *The Oxford Handbook on Religion and Ecology* (Gottlieb, 2006), compile scholarly articles in the manner of an encyclopedia to address “What are the relationships between human beings, their diverse religions, and the Earth’s living systems?” (Taylor, B., 2005) and “Religion and Ecology—What is the Connection and Why Does it Matter?” (Gottlieb, 2006).

Offering the most complete treatment are the published proceedings from the *Religions of the World and Ecology Series*, edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. Held from 1996 to 1998, ten separate conferences examined the major world’s religious traditions from an ecological perspective, exploring theology, doctrine, and practices. The conference proceedings focusing on Christian perspectives provided valuable framing of the theology supporting Christian responsibility for the environment and the biblical call for sustainable living (Hessel and Ruether, eds., 2000).

Even though scholarly research began shortly after White’s (1967) essay, the pace did not accelerate till later and came into its own in the 1980s, when “religious and philosophical ecological voices had become many” (Kearns, 2004, p. 474). The 1980s were characterized primarily as a period of reflection and theoretical/ecotheological development and by the 1990s,

reflection was beginning to transform into action: “During the eighties, theologians and religious groups alike had spent time articulating particular viewpoints; by the nineties, a plethora of religious voices and organizations could be found, and various ecumenical efforts flourished” (Kearns, 2004, p. 476). Today, Hawkin (2007) considers religious and spiritual voices and organizations a vital part of the global change movement. Innumerable organizations, church-led policy efforts, congregational projects, and other efforts have emerged as a result of this call.

An integrator for many of these organizations is the National Religious Partnership for the Environment. Its Web site ([www.nrpe.org](http://www.nrpe.org)), along with the one provided by the Forum for Religion and Ecology based out of Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (<http://fore.research.yale.edu/religion/>), provide lists of prominent national organizations and short summaries of an immense number of congregation-focused efforts to address this growing environmental call. Roger Gottlieb’s book, *A Greener Faith—Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet’s Future*, chronicles “the promises of this critically important movement, illuminating its principal ideas, leading personalities, and ways of connecting care for the earth with justice for human beings” (Gottlieb, 2006). Last year’s *Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism* conference at Yale Divinity School showcased many of these efforts, bringing together “eco-theologians and leading scholars of the world’s religions . . . with grassroots religious environmentalists to explore the obstacles and opportunities of religiously-engaged environmentalism.” The conference also featured the debut of a film, *Renewal: Inspiring Stories from America’s Religious Environmental Movement* that profiled a variety of religious organizations and actions focused on environmental topics, from environmental education for children to local food and energy conservation initiatives. Clearly, spiritual and

religious entities have done much to increase their focus on and response to the environmental crisis.

When taken as a whole, the various perspectives of Christianity on the environment encompass three categories having a “wide range of overlap, exceptions, or variety” (Kearns, 2004, p. 477): Christian stewardship, Eco-justice, and Creation Spirituality (Kearns, 1996, pp. 55-56 and 2004, p.477). Each has made important contributions both on the ground in terms of real projects, and in deepening the discussion about Christian environmental responsibilities. Each category is reflected by my research participants.

Christian stewardship appeals to Christians having a more evangelical and Bible-centered theology. It retains an anthropocentric, or human-centered, perspective but believes that God calls Christians to be good stewards of the creation, and to till and keep the creation (referring to the Genesis passages). Those with a stewardship perspective often spend significant time trying to dissuade conservative Christians from their focus on an otherworldly God, or personal-salvation only emphasis. This perspective finds the commitment to ‘saving the creation’ in biblical texts and believes God’s word is revealed through nature; nature is part of a “two-book” theology (Bible and the “book of nature”). Champions of this perspective, such as the Evangelical Environmental Network, have made significant contributions toward “creation care”: 1996 Endangered Species Act renewal, 2002 What Would Jesus Drive campaign, and the 2006 Evangelical Climate Initiative. Although the evangelical perspective often is considered one of stewardship, other faith traditions also reference stewardship as the basis for their ecotheologies.

Even beyond stewardship, many from mainstream and liberal Protestant and Catholic traditions align with an eco-justice perspective. Theologies framing this view consider the model

of Jesus and the Social Gospel tradition as the source of authority. They contend that the Gospel teaching of “love thy neighbor” extends to all people and the natural world. So, for example, they might argue that the Christian principle of the just treatment of one’s neighbor is applicable to the question of who pays the hidden costs for wastes and pollution.

The perspective of creation spirituality focuses on the wonder of the universe and the cosmological story of its evolution. The work of Matthew Fox (1983, 1988, and 2006) and more so, the perspectives of the “new cosmology” offered by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme (Swimme and Berry, 1994; Berry, 1990 and 1999) inform this group. Adherents to this worldview often come from the most liberal Protestant and Catholic groups, and are the most open to a wide array of spiritual traditions, deep ecology, mysticism, feminist goddess spirituality, and indigenous and ‘pagan’ traditions of earth centeredness. Kearns (2004) summarizes: “While in the first two, the Bible is either the main or an important source of authority and inspiration, in creation spirituality, the revelations of the universe supersede the knowledge of most religious traditions, and many find themselves creating a collage of spiritual sources that recognizes the need, or incorporates the viewpoint, that humans are but one part of a larger ecological web of beings” (pp. 478-479). Creation spiritualists embrace a numinous or immanent sense of the sacred in the world and are critical of the atomistic, Enlightenment scientific worldview in favor of the more ‘mystical’ new physics” (pp. 478-479).

Attributes of these perspectives are further illuminated in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation using illustrative quotes from the research participants.

## **Science Reaches Out**

Over a time period that roughly paralleled religion's emerging ecological consciousness, the science community came to recognize the potential for religion to promote environmental responsibility and began reaching out to and collaborating with religions through several international appeals which noted, especially, "the potential of religions for highlighting the awe and wonder of nature and the need to preserve it for present and future generations of all species" (Tucker, 2003, p. 44). Several significant consensus documents are highlighted in Appendix A of this dissertation (also summarized in Tucker, 2003):

- 1990 Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion (National Religious Partnership for the Environment)
- 1991 Joint Appeal in Religion and Science: Statement by Religious Leaders at the Summit on Environment (National Religious Partnership for the Environment)
- 1992 Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment
- 1992 World Scientists' Warning to Humanity (Union of Concerned Scientists)
- Earth's Climate Embraces Us All—A Plea from Religion and Science for Action on Global Climate Change (2004)
- 2007 Statement on Climate Change: Evangelicals and Scientists on Global Climate Change.

## **The Confluence**

The confluence marks the coming together of religion with contemporary science to create new views and revise old ones. I consider this a kind of restoration, or "re-storying." This is the New Story of Swimme and Berry (1994) or the reimagined, reinterpreted old story of (Wallis, 2008) and DeWitt (2008). Many of the religious and spiritual leaders at the forefront of faith-based calls for ecological responsibility and action understand the emerging cosmological

story and basic ecological principals. This is true, as well, for the role models highlighted in my dissertation (see Chapter 5). These leaders are not antagonistic to science, but see it as supporting a more authentic and sustainable creation story. Consider the words of preeminent theologian Mary Evelyn Tucker (2003):

If scientific cosmology gives us an understanding of the origins and unfolding of the universe, the story of cosmology gives us a sense of our place in the universe. And if we are so radically affecting the story by extinguishing other life forms and destroying our own nest, what does this imply about our religious sensibilities and our sense of the sacred? As science is revealing to us the particular intricacy of the web of life, we realize we are unraveling it, although unwittingly in part. As we begin to glimpse how deeply embedded we are in complex ecosystems and dependent on other life forms, we see we are destroying the very basis of our continuity as a species. As biology demonstrates a fuller picture of the unfolding of diverse species in evolution and the distinctive niche of species in ecosystems, we are questioning our own niche in the evolutionary process. As the size and scale of the environmental crisis is more widely grasped, we are seeing our own connection to this destruction (pp., 3-4).

With the dawning of this deepening knowledge, many are compelled to respond—not just with further questions and research, although that is essential to advancing scholarship, but also with actions. In framing the essential questions “motivating the religion and ecology dialogue,” Tucker (2003) illuminates the confluence of emerging scientific and religious inquiry:

What is humankind in relation to thirteen billion years of universe history? Can religions situate their stories within the universe story?

What is our place in the framework of 4.6 billion years of Earth history? Can [religions] revision human history within earth history? Can religions open up their traditions to embrace the planet as home and hearth?

How can we foster the stability and integrity of life processes? Can religions re-evoke and encourage the deep sense of wonder that ignites the human imagination in the face of nature’s beauty? Can religious traditions help us to find our niche as a species that does not overextend our effects and overshoot the limitations of fragile ecosystems (pp. 8-9)?

## **The Potential**

As a group, religious institutions have great potential to “wield moral authority” and shape worldviews, values, and actions. History has shown that “the efficacy of religions in encouraging individuals and communities to protect the environment is considerable in potentiality and demonstrable in actuality” (Tucker, 2003, p. 43). Preeminent biologist and “secular humanist” E.O. Wilson (2006), wrote to a fictitious Baptist preacher to make this plea:

Pastor, we need your help. The Creation—living nature—is in deep trouble. . . . You may well ask at this point, Why me? Because religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today, including especially the United States. If religion and science could be united on the common ground of biological conservation, the problem would soon be solved. If there is any moral precept shared by people of all beliefs, it is that we owe ourselves and future generations a beautiful, rich, and healthful environment. . . . You are well prepared to present the theological and moral arguments for saving the Creation. I am heartened by the movement growing within Christian denominations to support global conservation. The stream of thought has arisen from many sources, from evangelical to Unitarian. Today it is but a rivulet. Tomorrow it will be a flood (pp., 4, 5, 8).

It is worth remembering that there are many faces of Christianity, comprising “elements which are prophetic and transformative as well as conservative and constraining” (Tucker and Grim, 2000, p.xx). Tucker (2003) frames the problems and promise well:

We need to underscore the dark side of religious traditions as well as their lateness in awakening to the environmental crisis. In addition, we should note the ever-present gaps between ideal principles and real practices as well as the inevitable disjunction between modern environmental problems and traditional religious resources. For all these reasons, religions are necessary but not sufficient for solutions to environmental problems. Thus they need to be in dialogue with other religions and other disciplines in focusing on environmental issues (p. 19).

The potential pitfalls of religion are real and often are held up by those who look at the political prominence of ultraconservative Christians. But to turn away from religion is to miss an important venue for environmental outreach and change. In the same sentence where she warns us to keep the “qualifications” of religions “in mind,” Tucker reminds us “that religions

historically have been forces for positive change, liberating human energy for efficacious personal, social, and political transformation” (Tucker, 2003, pp. 20-21).

Religions have the potential to help shape “globally comprehensive environmental ethics” able to help mediate the seemingly disparate pathways and destinations of economic development and environmental protection interests. Most of the world’s religions share “common concern” for:

- Reverence for the earth
- Respect for other species
- Responsibility to the welfare of future generations
- Restraint in the consumption of resources
- Redistribution of goods and services more equitably (Tucker, 2003, p. 35).

In this country alone, the majority of people (over 70 percent, meaning more than 165 million people) consider themselves to be affiliated with a Christian faith group<sup>xi</sup> and while not are all active members and even fewer engage in spiritual formation and other educational opportunities, places of worship remain a central fount of American cultural identity, and community life and health. They offer great promise as social capital networks for delivering ecological spiritual formation and fostering environmental ethics and action (Putnam, 2000; Pew Forum on Religion and the Public Life, 2008). Gardner (2002) names five reasons to consider religious people and institutions as power centers for developing education and outreach efforts about ecological sustainability:

They shape people’s worldviews, wield moral authority, have the ear of multitudes of adherents, often possess strong financial and institutional assets, and are strong generators of social capital, an asset in community building (p. 5).

For these and other reasons, people and places of worship and spiritual development can be powerful forces for transforming lives and creating fundamental social change—the kind of deep change that is needed to save our earth and our disconnected lives. As history consistently demonstrates, religious institutions and spiritual development centers have great potential to influence behaviors positively and negatively (Wallis, 2005). One can look at the role of churches during this nation’s Civil Rights movement to grasp the potential influence of these institutions on radical change.

Within the churches, perspectives may vary (Kearns 1996 and 2004) and even more so, science and religion may have differences of view (Wilson, 2006). At the confluence, however, there is agreement about the urgency for a new way:

We will continue efforts to mobilize our two communities, separately and in joint initiatives. We do not have to agree on how and why the world was created in order to work together to preserve it for posterity. In this spirit, we call upon leaders in other sectors—commerce, labor, education, government, and non-governmental organizations, research and technology—to join us in finding ways to communicate to their own communities the urgency of this threat to our global commons and the well-being of future generations (From: *Earth’s Climate Embraces Us All—A Plea from Religion and Science for Action on Global Climate Change*, 2004).

The confluence of science and religion in the twenty-first century marks a time of hope, a moment of “cosmological grace.” After centuries of separation and alienation, a time of humility and cooperation appears to be emerging and accelerating. In the Foreword to a new Sierra Club book, *Holy Ground: A Gathering of Voices on Caring for Creation*, long time environmental leader and current Executive Director of the Sierra Club Carl Pope writes, “I confessed that my generation of environmentalists had sinned” (2008, p. 18):

In the heady aftermath of the first Earth Day, we had walked away from the churches, the synagogues, the mosques, and the temples—from the very institutions to which millions of people turn when seeking to live out their deepest values—and we thereby risked turning the environmental ethic into an environmental subculture (p. 18).

Now, however, the voices are coming together into an emerging field of religion and ecology:

This emerging field of religion and ecology, then, looks both inward and outward. It looks inward to the resources of the traditions, historically and at present, that foster mutually beneficial human-Earth relations. At the same time it looks outward toward dialogue with those in other disciplines such as science, economics, and policy, knowing that lasting cultural changes will depend on such key intersections (Tucker, 2003, p. 32).

## **CULTIVATING ECOLOGICAL ENLIGHTENMENT AND ACTION**

As science, policy, economic, regulatory, and technological efforts fall short of achieving environmental goals, more and more people are calling for greater attention to the religious, spiritual and psychological dimensions of the environmental crisis. Echoing a need shared by environmental programs worldwide, over 30 scientists from the Chesapeake Bay region, a watershed restoration initiative I am closely involved with in my professional work, issued a consensus report calling for, among other actions, “cultivating a new ethic: the enlightened citizen” (Boesch and Greer, 2003). Here they were implying a more *ecologically* enlightened citizen and suggesting that greater emphasis be placed on identifying ways to “awaken” people to adopt more sustainable consumer behaviors and lifestyle choices and become more conscious and deliberate in their actions.

The journey of enlightenment travels the realm of spirituality and religion. These disciplines play a vital role in crafting one’s ethical framework and overall worldview, provide the basis for considering questions on how to live, and frame the moral authority for making changes. In his book, *Spirituality and Sustainability*, author John Carroll (2004) concludes, “The environment is a religious question, a question of moral choice and spiritual values, and that it is

a religious question more fundamentally than it is a scientific, economic, or political question. Hence, we must accept that its resolution will be found within the religious or spiritual realm” (Carroll, 2004, p. 14). To do this, religions must move beyond “reformation” toward “transformation” at individual and community levels (Tucker, 2003, pp. 10-11). Religions must encourage an “ecological anthropology” (McFague, 2008, p. 44) and foster a “conversion experience deep in the psychic structure of the human” (Berry, as cited in Sessions, 1995, p. 12).

Different faith traditions consider the concept of enlightenment in different ways, but there is commonality in how the path is described. The journey is considered as one where travelers will move beyond the narrow gaze of their ego-limited perspectives to a deeper and wider awareness and sense of connection with all things; a felt understanding of interdependence and their place in the web of life; and a capacity to unify apparent opposites and to live a more integrated and coherent life (Fowler, 1995; Plotkin, 2008; Palmer, 2000). The journeyer steps toward greater wholeness that transcends personal boundaries, reaches out to the world, and stretches to the cosmos in “ever widening circles” of connection and awareness (Plotkin, 2008). The enlightened one is described as being more porous and permeable, devoted to “universalizing compassion” and experiencing “universal community” (Fowler, 1995, p. 200).

In Christianity the concept of enlightenment is considered a “change of heart,” “an opening heart,” or a “conversion” (Borg, 2003). Christians consider the heart as the center of our being. The condition of our heart affects our choices. It may be opened or closed, whole or damaged—the heart condition determines human reactions and responses. Prominent Christian theologians and philosophers contend that it is the figurative condition of the heart that dictates human capacity for holistic, sustainable living (Borg, 2003; McDaniel, 2000; Keating, 1986 and 1996).

Just like a sprawling suburban area has variations of hardness—the impermeable expanses of asphalt parking lots mixed with residential neighborhoods of manicured lawns and ornamental vegetation—each human heart hardens in different ways. Theologian Marcus Borg (2003) writes:

The condition of a closed heart covers a spectrum of hardness. Not all hearts are equally hard. In severe form, hard hearts are associated with violence, brutality, arrogance, and a rapacious world-devouring greed. These all have milder forms. The mild form of violence is judgmentalism; of brutality, insensitivity; of arrogance, self-centeredness; of rapacious greed, ordinary self-interest” (pp. 153-154).

A closed heart affects vision and action—“We do not see clearly when our hearts are closed” and may become “blind” (Borg, 2003, p. 152). The narrowed, self-interested perspectives or outright “blindness” of a closed heart often lead people to unsustainable life paths and daily choices. Current media are replete with examples of “closed hearted” actions leading to disastrous and far-reaching consequences.

An open heart, on the other hand, can transform people at a fundamental level, altering not just “how we do things,” but changing “the value presupposition of why we do things” (Carroll, 2001, p. 6). This change in perspective, turning away from old patterns and turning to new ones, provides a platform for learning about and embracing more sustainable ways of living and being in the world. In Christianity, “the fruits of the spirit” (see Galatians 5:22-26; Keating, 2000) emerge from an open heart. These qualities are not those of “human striving,” but instead encompass freedom, joy, peace, and love (Borg, 2003):

- Freedom from the voices of the would-be lords of our lives
- Joy of the exuberant life
- Peace of reconnection to what is, the peace that passes all understanding
- Love of God for us and love of God in us (p. 121).

These “fruits of the spirit” often lead to greater feelings of “universal compassion” and passion for justice (Fowler, 1995; Borg, 2003), moving the spiritual journey from one of inner transformation to outer action. Widening the lens typically applied to definitions of conversion by religious sources enables the framing of a holistic ecological conversion, defined by Schauffler (2003) as “an encompassing transformation that touches every facet of an individual’s life—physical, spiritual, emotional, psychological, and political” (p. 6).

A range of spiritual practices, considered spiritual disciplines, eloquently summarized by Richard Foster (1998), are considered the pathway to this kind of heart opening. Similarly, teacher and activist Parker Palmer (1998) indicates spiritual practice (i.e., spiritual formation) as:

The process by which we reconnect with our own souls in a way that allows us to reconnect with that which is outside of us, which is other than us. ... When you’ve lost touch with that which is deepest within you and are living from some other place, there’s no way to connect with that which is authentic in other people, the natural world, the world of spirit. And therefore, there is no way to be responsible, no way to respond. But the important thing to note is that this inner journey, which spiritual formation is all about in all the great traditions, if it’s taken authentically doesn’t end inside yourself. You end up moving through that inner place to a place of outward reconnection (p. 57).

When the concept of enlightenment is enlarged with an ecological lens, it implies “waking up” and “opening one’s heart” to the environment and environmental issues. It means developing “ecological consciousness” (Uhl, 2004) by awakening to:

- The awe and wonder of the living earth
- The dreadful beating we are inflicting on Earth and one another
- Our collective capacity to reverse present trends and to create a life-sustaining and just world (p. xviii).

Cultivating ecological enlightenment or an ecological consciousness is analogous to cultivating ecological identity. The “critical reflection and deep introspection” of ecological identity work encourages “a kind of personal awakening which allows people to bring their perceptions of

nature to the forefront of awareness and to orient their actions based on their ecological worldview (Thomashow, 1995, p. 23).

The ecologically enlightened person likely has an expanded umwelt, or broadened “physiological perceptual environment” that emerges from “a special confluence of ecology, psychology, and spirituality” (Thomashow, 2002, p. 93 and 47). It represents a stage of psychospiritual maturity that better understands concepts of interdependence and connection and is more capable of ecological action (Fowler, 1995; Plotkin, 2008; Korten, 2006). In short, to “cultivate the enlightened citizen” is to support the journey toward a more wholly communion.

Conventional responses to environmental problems consistently fall short of their intended goals. Consider this critique from Carroll (2004):

The three decades old environmental movement in the United States and the decade long green, deep ecology, and sustainability movements in this country have both generated a great quantity of talk, one might be tempted to say all talk and little action. Discussions, debates, books, articles, films, audio and video tapes, and so forth—talk, talk, talk. The three times older environmental movement, it is true, featured action in the form of the expenditure of great amounts of public and private funds for public works, sewage treatment plants, air pollution control, land and habitat acquisition, catalytic converters on automobiles, and in other expenditures. If the expenditure of funds be action, then this is action. But in all of this expenditure there emerged no environmental ethic, no change of values, no change in lifestyle or behavior. In fact, this great expenditure likely provided an excuse not to take real action, not to change from established ingrained behavioral ways (p.60).

In citing the need for an ecologically enlightened citizen, scientists and program managers in the Chesapeake Bay watershed noted similar failings in their long-time approaches:

Key laws, such as the Critical Area Act or the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, have helped control destructive development practices at the water’s edge. But legislation cannot and should not guide all our behaviors and decisions. How can we instill a new ethic, so that the future Chesapeake retains the beauty and productivity that have made it famous? How can we teach our children to treasure the landscape, that their behavior ultimately determines the health of the Bay (Boesch and Greer, 2003, p. 10)?

Efforts to restore and protect the environment, whether Chesapeake Bay restoration or broader issues like global climate change, will not succeed in the face of unsustainable personal choices and exploding growth and development (Boesch and Greer, 2003). The authors of the Bay evaluation quoted Reich from *The Greening of America* to indicate that a “change of consciousness” is at the “heart of everything” (as cited in Boesch and Greer, 2003, p.20), but they fell short of addressing how that change might come about. Instead, they returned to familiar ground in the final report, providing important policy, regulatory, science, technological, education and outreach actions for the major sectors affecting Bay quality (i.e., land use and development, point and nonpoint pollution control, transportation, forests, and agriculture), but left the key recommendation—cultivation of the enlightened citizen—untouched. Even though they repeatedly highlighted the vital role of the individual “enlightened” citizen who changes transportation habits, adopts and champions different patterns of land development, and “vote[s] with their dollars . . . for cleaner air, healthier forests, a restored Bay . . . [instead of] fancier homes, larger homes, and more perfect lawns” (Boesch and Greer, 2003, pp.156-157) they left “such larger questions about the character and impact of change to the sociologists and other students of the future” (p. 20). The *Chesapeake Futures* authors neglected to consider religion and/or spirituality as a source of enlightenment.

This tendency to fall back on well-worn ground is a common response. Even though many recognize the imperative for a “rapid evolution to a new consciousness,” few in the environmental field understand how to proceed. It will take time and it will take a staged approach. In calling for “a new consciousness,” long-time environmental leader and Dean of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies Gus Speth defined “next steps” and “next, next steps.” The “next steps” are to respond by applying “the approaches of today’s

environmentalism to address climate change and other challenges where serious action is long overdue” (p. 199); these are analogous to Macy and Brown’s (1998) “holding actions.” The “next, next steps” involve “a transformation in consciousness and a transformation in politics.” A “rise of a new consciousness” is imperative:

For some, it is a spiritual awakening—a transformation of the human heart. For others it is a more intellectual process of coming to see the world anew and deeply embracing the emerging ethic of the environment and the old ethic of what it means to love thy neighbor as thyself. But for all it involves major cultural change and a reorientation of what society values and prizes most highly (pp. 199-200).

In theory, the new consciousness will lead us to a new worldview where, “Consumerism, individualism, and domination of nature—the dominant values of yesteryear—have given way to a new triad: quality of life, human solidarity, and ecological sensibility” (Raskin, as cited in Speth, 2008, p. 205). As described earlier in this chapter, the values implied by the new consciousness are eloquently framed in the *Earth Charter* (“the most serious and sustained effort to date to state a compelling ethical vision for the future” [Speth, 2008, p.206]) and illuminated in Korten’s (2006) *The Great Turning* and Berry’s (1999) *The Great Work*. Theologians Sallie McFague (2008) and Mary Evelyn Tucker (2003) reference Berry’s notions extensively when challenging religions to enter their ecological phase.

As citizens, we must change the way we live. The pressure on ecosystems will increase globally in coming decades unless human attitudes and actions change (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005, p. 3). In concluding why the Chesapeake Bay Program is not attaining its goals, researchers shined a spotlight on the broader environmental challenges ubiquitous in the world:

Despite substantial effort and progress by the full spectrum of Partners, the Bay’s health remains degraded. Restoration efforts are being overtaken by current trends. For example, population in the watershed has grown by nearly 17 million bringing more homes, roads,

industrial and business parks and other impervious surfaces which harden the landscape. Development has drastically altered the natural hydrology and thereby the natural filtering systems for nutrient and sediment pollution (USEPA Region 3, 2008, p. i.).

The interplay between market forces and consumer choices is clear. As we saw earlier in this chapter, current trends are driven by the industrial growth economy of modern capitalism which is implicitly supported through consumer behavior.

As we learn more about this critical crossroads moment, many of us in Western society might feel appalled—wanting to reject the notion that we support an unsustainable “Technozoic” way. In our stated values, most of us consider ourselves pro-environment (ecoAmerica and SRIBusiness Intelligence, 2006). Yet our actions, whether deliberate or more often the result of not knowing or not thinking, speak otherwise. We live in a system that makes an Ecozoic way very difficult. Most of us, unconsciously, “built a system we cannot control” (Nhat Hanh, 2008):

This system imposes itself on us, and we have become its slaves and victims. Most of us, in order to have a house, a car, a refrigerator, a TV, and so on, must sacrifice our time and our lives in exchange. We are constantly under the pressure of time.... We say that time is money. We have created a society in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, and in which we are so caught up in our own immediate problems that we cannot afford to be aware of what is going on with the rest of the human family or our planet Earth (p. 48).

Blaming the “system” and all the other culprits, from greedy corporate CEOs to illegal immigrants, is a natural initial response to grave times. It is so much easier to look without than within as we are loathe to consider our own shadow (Plotkin, 2003 and 2008). Thomashow (1995) notes there are three distinct stages people go through when they begin to “internalize the magnitude of environmental degradation” (p. 155). First they tend to blame the externalized other—the “perceived perpetrator” such as the “greedy industrialist” (p. 155). This trend was exemplified in a comprehensive citizen survey conducted throughout the Chesapeake Bay Basin—most people blamed “business and industry” (McClafferty, 2002) or incompetent and

careless farmers, as the sources of problems. These two stakeholder groups received the focus of much early Bay Program attention, even though emerging understanding of the Bay's problems clearly indicates that the foundational problems link to the consumer choices and day-to-day behavior of an ever burgeoning Bay basin population (Boesch and Greer, 2003).

The tendency to avoid introspection is common. We see the implications of disowned shadow at all realms of society. The tendency is to blame someone other than us and we are “victims” of the actions of this external entity. With increasing awareness and “closer examination,” however, Thomashow asserts that we begin to recognize our own culpability (Stage Two), realizing that, “If I am a member of the culture, and I contribute (unknowingly perhaps) to its actions, then I am also the perpetrator” (Thomashow, 1995, p. 155).

Recognizing our role may lead to an unproductive “blame-guilt loop.” The trick for the third stage is to understand how to transform the negative cycle into positive and productive actions for change. The transformation inherent in Stage Three enables people to “take responsibility for their actions and move forward to change themselves and society” (Thomashow, 1995, p. 155). It may require a deeper response, one born from a kind of wisdom referenced by economist E. F. Schumacher (1973) in his classic book *Small is Beautiful*:

The exclusion of wisdom from economics, science, and technology was something which we could perhaps get away with for a little while, as long as we were relatively unsuccessful; but now that we have become very successful, the problem of spiritual and moral truth moves into the central position (p. 33). . . . But what is wisdom? Where can it be found? Here we come to the crux of the matter: it can be read about in numerous publications but it can be found only inside oneself. To be able to find it, one has first to liberate oneself from such masters as greed and envy. The stillness following liberation—even if only momentary—produces the insights of wisdom which are obtainable in no other way (p. 38).

## **Dimensions of Ecological Enlightenment**

While many call for a change of conscious and ecological enlightenment, few explore in detail what that looks like on the ground. I discovered quickly in my role model research for this dissertation that there are many ways to express an awakened ecological sensibility and commitment to a sustainable way of life.

In order to evaluate potential research participants, it was necessary to develop a working framework for ecological enlightenment and sustainable action. I did this in two ways: (1) I evaluated the myriad calls for action from religious and science realms (summarized earlier in this chapter and in Appendix A) and (2) reviewed the literature for research studies on actual cases of people “walking the talk.” I turn first to the words calling for environmental responsibility and then to the examples of on-the-ground action.

### **The Words**

While some may claim the many science and religious directives, consensus letters, and policy statements are long on words and short on actions, they represent an important phase of coming into awareness. For example, Sr. Gail Worcelo, co-founder of the Green Mountain Monastery (see Chapters 3-5) describes her transformation from the mental action of envisioning and writing a Rule of Life for the new monastery to the embodied action of becoming the change described by the Rule:

One vow in the religious life [is]: I vow to transform my consciousness for the sake of the whole. If that really happened and as that happens, the Rules of Life fall away. They are like from an old era, Rules, because when you have a transformed consciousness, you know how to behave, you don't need rules. . . So, you start from a whole other point and then you start moving forward in a new way. The Rules become unnecessary, so a lot of this stuff from the tradition formally, that some people still need, like some guidelines and strictures to follow, that is a conversion for me, in a recent way, of thinking ... oh,

wait a minute, oh wow, all that I wrote, and all that Rule of Life that I wrote, I could take and throw because now I know that what it is, is that awakening into oneness.

She indicated in more detail in the interview that the principles and guidelines for daily behavior described in the Rule became internalized and embodied as normal practice. The written words of a community's Rule of Life, just like the contents of all the various calls for ecological responsibility and commitment to a sustainable way of life, provide guideposts for the journeyer, who, once committed to the path and familiar with the directions, no longer needs them. They remain available, however, if the person gets lost.

Exploration of the various calls that are emerging from the religion and science realms enables us to identify attributes of an ecologically enlightened and committed person. It was impossible to review all of the calls to action because they are so numerous. Practically every denomination has its own document or series of documents. Interfaith efforts and collaborative efforts between religion and science expand the list. However, in Appendix A, I summarized some of the major calls and performed an informal content analysis on what they require. Each call from the major religious denominations suggests a first step of repentance and conversion. The language from the *Common Declaration by Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I* (2002) is representative:

What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation. The problem is not simply economic and technological; it is moral and spiritual. A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act (para. 7).

After repentance and ecological conversion, the various letters and declarations collectively identify the need for stewardship and care of creation; eco-justice; commitment to

future generations and children; frugality, simplicity, and a sustainable way of life; and a peaceful response. The calls mostly present broad recommendations with few specifics although some recommended actions are presented. They tend to fall into the categories of:

- Lifestyle choices: adopting an ethic of conservation and voluntary simplicity, reducing consumption, and purchasing local goods
- Energy conservation: turning from fossil fuels to renewable and cleaner energy sources
- Pollution prevention
- Sustainable food: organic, local, and fair-trade
- Education and Outreach: “tithe time, treasure, talent to environmental causes” (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003); educate people about environmental topics; lobby for pro-environmental legislation.

Further, because these calls are from religious entities, they include recommendations for prayer, worship, bible study, and reflection, as well as traditionally religious values of justice, humility, generosity, compassion, and frugality to “fulfill our vocation as moral images of God, reflections of divine love and justice charged to ‘serve and preserve’ the Garden (Genesis 2:15)” (National Council of Churches, 2005).

The collective language from these various letters, directives, initiatives, and policy documents helps us qualify the principles and actions that will comprise an ecologically converted person and/or institution of faith. Directions for new guiding norms that will lead to more ecologically responsible and sustainable action are consistent and clear. It remains to be seen if these edicts and related approaches will work to affect the scale of change demanded in these times: “will practice follow of its own accord, or will religions have to be prodded to translate ideas into action?” (Tucker, 2003, p. 24).

## **The Action: Calls in Practice**

The extensive documentation suggesting how people of faith should respond to the environmental crisis, including suggested specific actions, is not lacking. To the contrary, there is so much information, it is overwhelming even for someone like myself who has over 25 years experience contemplating and responding to environmental concerns through my academic and professional career. Despite this abundance of information and thoughtful policy work, many scholars (Carroll, 2004; Cobb, 2001; McFague, 2000 and 2008; and Tucker, 2002 and 2003) have commented on the apparent disconnect between the religious theory for environmental care and the actual praxis of living ecologically sustainable lives. My own literature review conducted for this dissertation underscored these assertions. In addition to the vast amount of theological analysis and church responses outlined previously in this chapter, I discovered ample general works addressing what it means to live sustainably and even primers on how to do it, but uncovered nothing that explored a Christian's **formation process** of becoming sustainable. While there is some excellent case study research on religious institutions, communities, and some leaders, the available information on how Christian individuals came to "walk the talk" of ecological sustainability, especially studies that explore the "process of becoming," is limited.

Even beyond the Christian perspective, grounded theory studies focusing on "ecological conversion" or transformation processes that support ecological enlightenment and sustainable action are limited and other studies remain largely theoretical (Plotkin, 2008; Speth, 2008). Social sciences, especially psychology, are beginning to consider the topic of sustainability in individuals, but most of that literature also is long on theory and short on providing a detailed exploration of process. Two dissertations explore the topic of sustainability in individuals and families using grounded theory analysis (Scherch, 1997 and Judkins, 2004) and provide

interesting background information, but do not address in depth the topics of religion, spirituality, and spiritual formation in relationship to sustainability. Another comprehensive work explores the lives of well-known environmental writers who turned toward the earth (Schauffler, 2003). These studies are described more in Chapter 4.

Additionally, two researchers have extensively studied Christian religious communities that are trying to embody the vision and teachings of Thomas Berry (1988 and 1999; also Swimme and Berry, 1994) by practicing sustainable living and becoming Earth Literacy centers (Carroll, 2004 and Taylor, 1999, 2002 and 2007). These case studies detail the kinds of on the ground actions that are being taken and provide a “real world” vision of a new way.

In his search to find those who “walk their talk,” Carroll (2004) evaluated a number of religious communities and discovered a collection of women’s religious communities (and, to a lesser extent men’s religious communities), informally organized as the Sisters of Earth network, that “have been heroically and courageously walking their talk” (Carroll, 2004, p. 60). In his Forward to Carroll’s book, environmental writer Bill McKibben observes that “Carroll begins his journey looking for examples of environmental sustainability, and I think he has found them—more convincing examples than people who have looked in more obvious and secular places” (p. x).

Carroll posits that a move toward “true sustainability” will need to rely on “some form of deep-seated faith, perhaps on some sort of spirituality, or some sort of religion, religion defined broadly, not narrowly, which will strengthen humans sufficiently to face the challenge implied in making changes. . . and this faith must be buttressed with the strength that comes from community. . . ” (p. 16). Carroll surmises that because the transformation toward authentic sustainability requires religion and spirituality coupled with community, “it may well be that

‘faith communities’ or ‘communities of faith’ will need to form to assist society, a society so often made up of collections of individuals who are trained to see and to think individually rather than communally or collectively” (p. 16). To evaluate the efficacy of these communities, Carroll summarized “principles of sustainability” based on Christian farmer Wendell Berry’s 17 principles of sustainability and back-to-the-land pioneers Helen and Scott Nearing (See Appendix A of this dissertation). Carroll’s resulting book profiled many of these religious communities, especially those within the Sisters of Earth network, and provided helpful summaries of their sustainability practices (see Appendix A).

Sarah McFarland Taylor is another scholar focusing on the Sisters of Earth who has devoted much of her academic career “researching green sisters and composing a contemporary history of the movement” (Taylor, 2002, p. 229). Like Carroll, most of her research focuses on how these communities practice sustainability and less on the transformative process of becoming committed to sustainability.

In looking at their ministries, Taylor (2007) identified ten categories that describe how the green sisters are responding to the “call of the earth” and living into a new ecological era. The categories address learning and teaching, organic gardening, ways of “reinhabiting” place, modeling sustainability, cultivating diversity and biodiversity, conserving heirlooms, providing sanctuary, celebrating the “cosmic liturgy,” creating space for new growth, and living the vision.

McFarland and Carroll profile what ecological enlightenment and a sustainable way of life look like on the ground as practiced by these “green” religious communities. Their detailed summaries of these on-the-ground practices supplement the words from the myriad religious and science calls for action with practical suggestions for a sustainable way of life. When taken

together, the calls and responses outlined in Appendix A portray an ecologically enlightened

Christian citizen committed to a sustainable way of life as one whom:

- Lives mindfully and is conscious of consumer actions, paying attention to full life cycle costs and ecological footprints
- Eats low on the food chain
- Supports sustainable, local, organic food production
- Seeks environmentally sound housing (or at least ways to minimize their housing footprint)
- Incorporates significant energy conservation measures and other ways to reduce energy consumption
- Seeks renewable sources for heating and cooling
- Implements renewable forms of electricity, such as solar and wind
- Modifies transportation needs and seeks to drive less and only when it is necessary to drive; uses the most fuel efficient form of vehicle possible
- Reduces material consumption and is committed to simplicity
- Reduces waste through recycling, reusing, reducing (precycling), and composting
- Conserves water
- Integrates earth into traditional and new worship services and rituals
- Maintains a discipline of prayer and meditation
- Spends time in nature and looks to nature as revelation.
- Actively reaches out to others in various social and earth ministries
- Is environmentally literate and active
- Pursues ecumenical approaches

Additional details are found in Appendix A and in Carroll and Taylor's books. I learned in the course of my research there are as many ways to interpret these as there are calls. However, there

is commitment to a path and consciousness about the way. Chapters 4 and 5 provide additional details.

## **LOOKING AHEAD**

There is a clear well-paved road that leads to limitless temptation and consumer choices. This is the road typified by Washington, DC's Capital Beltway and all the arteries emanating from it, including the one leading to my former dwelling place near Tyson's Corner, Virginia: "You name it, you can buy it at the sprawling Tyson's Corner Center mall in this Washington, DC suburb. Keep time with a watch from Swatch, pass time with a book from B. Dalton's, erase time with Botox injections at Le Salon" (*USA Today*, March 11, 2002). This road encompasses the major economic engine of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and is source of many of its environmental woes. The same road that drives people and fortunes is also the one that carries sediment and nutrient pollution to a once biologically abundant and now gravely threatened habitat. Its reach is even further—a long day's drive west and over the "Eastern Continental Divide" to the Appalachian Highlands of West Virginia where coal blasted from the mountain tops keep the engine running.

The other road is so infrequently traveled that it is a mere trace, but it leads to awakened sensibility, deeper understandings of place and time, felt sense of connection with all beings, a sense of wholeness—a more wholly communion—and a sustainable way of life. It is the road of the Great Turning (Macy and Brown, 1998; Korten, 2006; Speth, 2008) and is the Great Work (Berry, 1999) of our time.

This new way forward requires a turning from the dominant paradigms of western culture toward a new way. As this chapter illuminates through its multidisciplinary literature review,

navigating this “less traveled” direction seems overwhelming at times, but researchers and writers are beginning to identify signs of hope (Carroll, 2004; Hawkin, 2007; McKibben, 2007; Speth, 2008; Taylor, 2007). Paul Hawkin (2007), in particular, extensively documented the vast, but atypical, movement to “safeguard nature and ensure justice” (p. 1). The people and organizations he profiled point to the new way and represent a vast array of responses to the *Earth Charter’s* call to “imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally” (Earth Charter Commission, 2000).

Speth (2008) also notes signs of hopes but cautions, “the impossible will take a little while. There is much to be done, and it will not be easy” (p. 235). But it must be done; “We must all be out to save the world, literally” (Speth, 2008, p. 236). Through his extensive research Hawkin discovered hopefulness born from the “resilience of human nature” in responding to the “gravity of our environmental and social condition” (Hawkin, 2007, p. 189). In my research, I rediscovered hopefulness from my research participants. When I became overwhelmed by the extensive commentary on environmental degradation in the literature or depressed by the magnitude and horror of mountaintop removal destroying my old West Virginia stomping grounds, I would return to each interviewee’s story as a reminder of the new way. Each would say their actions are humble, but small actions have the potential to build to larger responses. I imagine each role model at the critical crossroads and I see them pausing, reflecting on their next steps and making a conscious decision to turn in a more sustainable direction. As you will come to learn in Chapters 4 and 5, these are ordinary people who have heard the calls and are responding. They give me the hope that I, and others, can turn, too.

I conclude this chapter by returning to West Virginia and sharing another sign of hope. After the governor acted unilaterally to “open” the state “for business,” the citizens awakened

from indifference and protested the change. The widespread reaction to his radical changing of the state's deeply held identity affected a turn and demonstrated the power and potential of a united citizenry: And in the words of Margaret Mead, "Never underestimate the power of a small, dedicated group of people to change the world; indeed, that is the only thing that ever has." Today, West Virginia is "Wild and Wonderful" once again. A small step, but a start.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY: LEARNING FROM THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE**

Each participant included in my research can point to at least one other person, living or historic, that guided and inspired them on their journeys to a more ecologically enlightened and sustainable way of life. The journey toward “enlightenment,” whether spiritual or ecological, is often described as resulting from following a path or a “way” (Borg, 2003). Anyone on such a journey must take her or his own steps, but it frequently helps to learn from those who have gone before. Each person’s tracks will be unique, but the pathways may overlap. Some people are true pioneers, breaking trail toward an imagined but unknown destination: “It was like there was a magnet at the end and we didn’t know where the end was, but we just kept going in that direction” (S. Hill, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

Most of the research participants in this study identified a living person that inspired them, sometimes well-known people like Father Thomas Berry or Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis and other times lesser known individuals such as a school teacher or co-worker. Historic role models also were vital. Quite a few of my research participants were influenced by the life of Jesus as a model, for example.

My research considers the stories of 10 Christian role models that are forging new pathways of sustainable living as an expression of their faith. I employed two distinct but closely related techniques—one academic and one spiritual—to explore these pathways and identify places of intersection and common direction. Academically, I employed the grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1990 and 1998; and Charmaz 2006) to uncover themes and subthemes (i.e., open and axial codes) of these role model journeys. I also

employed the ancient reflective practice of *Lectio Divina* to “listen and attend with the ear of my heart” to gain an even deeper level of understanding of each participant’s words and wisdom.

This chapter explains my choice of research methods and then provides details on my data collection and analysis procedures. It provides a brief introduction to my research participants; additional details on each role model’s journey are presented in Chapters 4 and 5. The chapter concludes with a discussion of data quality, trustworthiness, and research limitations.

## **RATIONALE FOR GROUNDED THEORY**

The results of this investigation provide information, grounded in the research participant’s own words and experiences, about the **process** by which they gained consciousness about ecological issues and turned from the dominant cultural paradigm of material consumption toward a sustainable way of life. Since my focus is on the transformative process with the hope of identifying common themes and developing a preliminary theory of factors supporting ecological enlightenment and sustainable action in Christians, the grounded theory methodology outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and elaborated on by Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) and Charmaz (2006) provided the most applicable approach to collecting and analyzing the data. I considered other research methodologies (e.g., action research and phenomenology as described by Creswell, 1998; Greenwood and Levin, 1998; and Van Manen, 1990), but grounded theory was the most suitable methodology for the research questions comprising my study.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

I incorporated the discipline and methodological strategies outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), but my research used a constructivist perspective as illuminated by Charmaz (2006). Charmaz embraces the same strategy of simultaneous data collection and analysis advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998), whereby “data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship with one another” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 12). However, a constructivist approach acknowledges the interpretive tradition of theory development and supposes that analysis results from the “interplay between researchers and data” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 13). Data are the result of the research participant recalling, reflecting on, and telling their experience and the emerging theory is an interpretation based on the researcher’s view (Charmaz, 2006). The theory that results from a constructivist approach is not intended to be universally valid, but is “contextually situated in time, place, culture, and situation” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131). This contrasts to an objectivist grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) which implies “that data are untouched by the competent researcher’s interpretations” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131 summarizing Glaser, 2002). However, even grounded theorists schooled in the objectivist approach acknowledge that analysis is “both science and art” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 13) subject to the researcher’s interpretation.

A constructivist grounded theory is appropriate for my research because I asked participants to reflect on and recall their personal journeys. Time passes and human memory is imperfect, but the impact of the experience as recalled and interpreted by the participants is valid and reflects their reality. The story that emerges “reflects the viewer as well as the viewed” and presents an “image of *a* reality, not *the* reality” (Charmaz, 2000, pp. 522-523).

My research sought to understand the factors and transformative experiences that contributed to an individual turning from an old way of being toward a more ecologically awakened perspective and commitment to a sustainable way of life. I sought to understand, not to predict. My data suggest causality and “define conditional statements that interpret how subjects construct their realities” but do not present a widely “generalizable truth” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524). However, my research identifies themes (causal conditions) that are shared among these 10 role models and provides data that are useful to others in suggesting critical factors to consider when developing approaches to “cultivate the ecologically enlightened citizen.” The common themes revealed from the stories and experiences of my research participants “constitute a set of hypotheses and concepts that other researchers can transport to similar research problems and to other substantive fields,” thus fulfilling the positivist grounded theorist’s criterion of usefulness by offering “explanation and understanding” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524).

A constructivist approach does not imply a reduced methodological rigor, although it leaves room for a deeper exploration of the research participant’s experience and provides a more interpretive lens for exploring the data (Charmaz, 2000). The approach remains true to the basic procedures of grounded theory that are designed to “provide some standardization and rigor to the process” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 13). The procedural guidelines include (Charmaz, 2000, pp. 510-511):

- Iterative process of data collection and analysis
- Multiple levels of coding
- Constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) to construct codes and categories
- Memo writing to help explore data and develop emerging concepts

- Theoretical sampling to refine and “saturate” emerging theoretical ideas
- Integration of emerging concepts into a preliminary theoretical framework.

Each of these topics is addressed in the Data Collection section of this chapter.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Throughout this project I upheld stringent ethical standards for each research component: purpose statement and research questions, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and writing and disseminating the research. To the maximum extent possible, I followed the guidelines offered by Creswell (2003, pp. 63-67). Vital to this was Antioch’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) review of my proposal and my thorough Informed Consent Letter. I was also fortunate to have an engaged Dissertation Committee and a non-biased and thorough outside reviewer.

I was transparent about the purpose of my research and shared a project summary, research questions, and interview guide with each participant prior to our time together. These materials clearly described the project, provided background information about me and my interest in the topic. I also was happy to answer any participant questions. I wanted interviewees to have a full and complete understanding of the research they were participating in and to avoid any confusion or hint of deception. At the outset of the interview, I went over the Informed Consent Letter to make sure they understood their rights as a research participant, especially their capability to refuse to answer questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. No participant refused to answer questions or requested to withdraw, although a couple offered some “off the record” information. Any “off the record” information was treated in that manner and not included in the data reporting.

Maintenance of participant confidentiality also is essential to maintaining the ethical standard of privacy. I used participant names only when given permission by them on the signed Informed Consent Letter. Per their consent, I retained ownership of the data for the period of time needed to complete the dissertation and subsequent publications. I stored data carefully to ensure its safe-keeping.

Ethical standards also apply to data analysis, writing and disseminating the research results. I used a number of data validation procedures for ensuring accurate quality analysis (see Trustworthiness section at the end of this chapter). When writing my dissertation, I used unbiased and nonjudgmental language (Creswell, 2003) and incorporated direct quotes from the interviews to support the findings. Using the research participant's actual words from the interviews supported clear, honest, and nonbiased reporting of results. I presented information accurately and objectively, striving not to "suppress, falsify, or invent" (Creswell, 2003, p. 67). My use of objective outside readers to review my data analysis, interpretation, and draft report supported attainment of these accuracy and ethical standards.

### ***LECTIO DIVINA AS A RESEARCH METHOD***

The practice of *Lectio Divina* literally means "divine reading," typically of scripture, but it can be applied to other texts including the "book of nature." I used the practice of *Lectio* to deepen my reflection on role model responses, considering their words a form of wisdom literature.

*Lectio* typically involves four steps: reading, reflecting, responding, and resting. The text is read multiple times, slowly and deliberately. Then, the reader pauses and reflects deeply on the "words" that are "heard". Rather than "thinking about the words," the posture is one of:

ruminating [or] sitting with a sentence, phrase or even one word that emerges from the text, allowing the Spirit to expand our listening capacity and to open us to its deeper meaning. . . . As we repeat the phrase or sentence slowly, over and over, a deeper insight may arise (Keating 2008).

Response is considered a “spontaneous movement of the will” (Keating 2008) that may take the form of an insight, question, prayer, observation, or journal/memo writing. For my research, response also included the occasional “ah ha” moment about how a particular aspect of an interview should be coded. Eventually the reader is invited to simply rest quietly with the word or image so it may be assimilated, moving from “conversation to communion” (Keating 2008).

Father Thomas Keating, founder of Contemplative Outreach, a national organization committed to reviving the practices of Contemplative Prayer and *Lectio Divina* summarizes the four steps of the monastic tradition of *Lectio Divina* as:

four moments along the circumference of a circle. All the moments of the circle are joined to each other in a horizontal and interrelated pattern as well as to the center, which is the Spirit of God speaking to us through the text and in our hearts (Keating 2008).

I spent significant time with the words (interview tapes and written transcripts) of each research participant before and after coding, listening, reading, reflecting and ruminating, and ultimately resting so they could sink in at a deeper level. Often this reflective time was done prayerfully with mindful intent—I would light a candle, close the door to a private room, and settle in for an extended period of time. Other times, I would take the words on a walk in the woods, combining *Lectio* of the Word with *Lectio* of the natural world, to help me see patterns and threads of meaning. These walks became a vital part of my methodology as well as my practice. In addition to treating my research as an academic exercise, it became an enriching spiritual discipline.

## **DATA COLLECTION**

The focus of this study was adult (male and female) Christian role models of ecological enlightenment who are committed to a sustainable way of life. In order to develop a sound preliminary theory grounded in the experiences of these role models, a critical early step in my research was to identify and include appropriate participants: proven role models capable of reflecting on their experiences. I used a purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 2002) to identify “information-rich” cases.

Purposeful sampling provided the initial list of potential research participants and theoretical sampling helped determine the trajectory of data collection (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). My sample size of 10 role models was selected from a much larger pool of potential research participants suggested by expert nominators. The participants cover the spectrum of Christian expression from Evangelical to Catholic religious community members, laity to clergy.

### **Participant Selection**

My intention for this dissertation research was to be open to a range of ideas surrounding the concepts of ecological enlightenment and sustainability. Therefore, I chose not to employ stringent screening criteria (criterion sampling) that would impose a narrow perspective, but I did seek participants that had moved well beyond entry level actions (like simple recycling) to a demonstrated thoughtfulness and committed response—people who really “walked the talk” of ecological enlightenment as called for by:

- Scholars
- Environmental organizations

- Religious institutions and other faith-based efforts
- The internationally acclaimed and endorsed *Earth Charter*.

To find potential research participants, I sought nominations from many of the leaders and scholars who had crafted these calls. I approached the nomination process in two strategic ways. Nominations for initial sampling were largely based on personal connections made through my 20-plus year career as an environmental consultant. Specifically, I sent nomination letters to the authors of the *Chesapeake Futures* report and other colleagues associated with the Chesapeake Bay Program, a long-term client and a personally significant bioregion since I am a ninth-generation Chesapeake Bay watershed citizen.

After evaluating the results of this initial sampling strategy, I strategically identified additional nominators that would help fill research gaps (using theoretical sampling; see the next section of this chapter). I discovered potential nominators (and research participants since in some cases they were one in the same) through an extensive outreach effort that included contacting Dissertation Committee members and other contacts (e.g., professional, academic, and avocational colleagues), a literature review and Internet search. I found the case study work of Carroll (2004) and Taylor (1999 and 2007) to be particularly helpful in identifying potential Catholic religious role models. The online environmental magazine *Grist* (July 24, 2007) identified green religious leaders and helped me find potential Evangelical nominators and role models. An interfaith conference, *Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism*, at Yale Divinity School (2008) provided an excellent opportunity to meet nominators and role models.

This two-pronged approach yielded expert nominators that were scholars and leading practitioners in the fields of ecological sustainability, spirituality, religion, and/or ecotheology

(see Appendix B). Nominators had extensively studied and written about ecological enlightenment, sustainability, and spirituality/religion or created and/or led organizations and programs that addressed these topics. Some nominators, such as Margaret Galiardi, Calvin DeWitt, and Matthew and Nancy Sleeth, had written about, created organizations, and actively embodied sustainability and spirituality, so they ended up being research participants, as well.

I initiated contact with nominators through a combination of telephone and email correspondence depending on the strength of my connection to them. Each nominator was sent a letter explaining my project and asking them to identify one or more adult Christian role models of ecological enlightenment and a sustainable way of living. They were invited to include themselves as a role model.

Appendix C presents a copy of the letter sent to each nominator and Appendix D provides a copy of the research summary that accompanied each nominator letter.

After receiving a list of potential research participants, I contacted some of them by letter (see Appendix E) and telephone (if necessary). Because some nominators offered many potential candidates, it was necessary for me to narrow their lists through additional consultation with the nominator and consideration of theoretical sampling needs.

My contact with potential research candidates served to introduce the research project and gauge their interest and suitability. Whether identified by personal connections, personal knowledge, or by an expert nominator, each recommended research participant affirmed the nominator's perspective by positively self-identifying with the following questions:

- Do you self-identify as a **Christian or someone who has a Christian orientation** to your spiritual practice?
- Do you consider yourself **ecologically enlightened** or committed to that path?

- Are you consciously and actively committed to **pursuing a sustainable way of life?**
- Do you **engage in one or more spiritual practices?**

If they answered “yes” to these broad screening criteria and were willing to participate, I talked with them in more detail and set up a time and place for an in-depth interview. Most interviews were conducted in-person, three by telephone. Final candidates were sent a preliminary list of interview questions to reflect on in advance of our meeting and an Informed Consent letter to review and sign.

I selected the final 10 research participants with an attempt to balance the range of expression emerging from the Christian ecological movement: Christian stewardship, Eco-justice, and Creation Spirituality (Kearns, 1996, pp. 55-56). I also sought to balance ages, genders, and religious role (e.g., lay people, clergy, and religious community). Theoretical sampling also helped in the selection process.

When doing a qualitative analysis of peoples’ stories and personal experiences, it is imperative to protect the privacy of research participants and to respect their rights and personal boundaries. I applied high privacy standards to my research, ensuring that participants clearly understood the project and their role in it and realized the voluntary nature of the project and their right to withdraw. Each research participant was invited to choose their own pseudonym, although all but one chose to use their actual names. Further, I engaged my research participant’s actively throughout the project, especially by providing opportunities for them to review transcripts and summaries of the interview.

This project also was reviewed and approved by Antioch’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure my methodology upheld the rights of each participant. In addition, I prepared and distributed a detailed Informed Consent Letter that spelled out participant rights. I went over

the Letter with each interviewee, ensuring they understood it and agreed to its parameters. When we reach mutual agreement on the ethical standards of the study, the participant and I signed the Informed Consent Letter, indicating our mutual agreement. The Consent Letter used for my study, based on recommendations from Creswell (2003), is presented as Appendix F of this proposal.

### **Theoretical Sampling: Expanding the Research Base**

Data sampling for a grounded theory study emerges as the initial information is collected and reviewed. The ideal of any grounded theory methodology is to use theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation is attained. The grounded theorist's sample scope and size is based on simultaneous data collection, coding, and analysis that inform "what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop [her] theory as it emerges" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 45).

My study was initiated using purposeful sampling to identify an initial pool of potential research candidates. After completing several interviews, I began sharing preliminary results with Dissertation Committee members and colleagues. These early results yielded more questions and potential new directions of inquiry. To expand my research base, I used theoretical sampling based on this early analysis of interview summaries and transcripts. As soon as these documents were prepared from the raw interview notes and tape recorded interviews, I began reviewing and coding them using standard grounded theory protocols as described in the Data Analysis section of this chapter. This analysis helped me see what initial themes and questions emerged, and what new research directions I should explore. Theoretical sampling protocols

helped me undertake a characteristic grounded theory journey described by Charmaz (2006, p. 98):

Turns and twists in your research journey leave you with questions about directions to take, how quickly to proceed, and what you will have when you arrive. Theoretical sampling prompts you to retrace your steps or take a new path when you have some tentative categories and emerging, but incomplete ideas. By going back into the empirical world and collecting more data about the properties of your category, you can saturate its properties with data and write more memos, making them more analytic as you proceed.

For my study, this tracking occurred by modifying and adding interview questions, seeking new participants, and looking into the literature.

The key to theoretical sampling is NOT to seek representativeness or a larger or statistically generalizeable sample size (Charmaz, 2006, p. 100). Theoretical sampling pertains to “conceptual and theoretical development” and has the objectives of (Charmaz, 2000, p. 519 and Charmaz, 2006, p. 100):

- Developing and filling out emerging categories
- Refining ideas, and
- Eventually attaining theoretical saturation.

Theoretical sampling is a systematic and strategic approach to sampling that depends on sufficient data analysis so that preliminary categories are identified and key analytical directions ascertained. By following these emerging threads from the preliminary inquiry, theoretical sampling enables a researcher to “delineate and develop the properties of your category and its range of variation” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 103). In this method:

Choices of informants, episodes, interactions are being driven by a conceptual question not by a concern for representativeness. The prime concern is with the conditions under which the construct or theory operates, not with the generalization of the findings to other settings (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 29).

### **Theoretical Saturation**

Theoretical saturation is that place where “no additional data are being found whereby the sociologist can develop properties of the category” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61). The researcher begins to see “similar instances over and over again”—a sign that a “category is saturated” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 61). Many have questioned the reality of saturation (Charmaz, 2006) suggesting instead a goal of “theoretical sufficiency.” I gathered data until “gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights, nor reveals new properties of these core theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 113). While the concept of saturation varies among researchers—some claiming it is never attained (Charmaz, 2006)—I gathered information from my initial set of informants, supplemented by additional interviews with new research participants, as well as textual analysis of related documents, until I found no new patterns and all themes fit into existing categories.

### **Interview Guide**

The sustainability journeys of Christian role models, as expressed through their own words, provided the primary data for my study. Therefore, it was imperative to design and conduct an interview process that supported their recollections, thoughtful reflection, and focused attention.

The basis for my interviews was an interview guide (Appendix G) comprised of notes about the study’s background and main questions (plus probing questions to support the interviewee’s reflection and memory if necessary) to focus the interview and make sure key topics were covered. Preparation of the interview guide was a critical part of the methodology because it helped me facilitate a thorough, yet focused, approach to interviewing that provided

rich data to mine for emerging concepts and preliminary theory. I pilot tested the guide before using it in the interviews. Feedback from the pilot test helped me to clarify and refine the interview questions. The interview guide also evolved throughout the interviewing process as theoretical sampling unveiled new paths and places to explore more deeply.

The questions comprising the in-depth interviews were open-ended and semi-structured. The interview guide provided the framework required for a semi-structured approach to ensure the research participant and I stayed on track and covered the breadth and depth of information required for this study. Within the semi-structured framework, however, I asked open-ended questions in two broad areas:

Your Sustainability Journey

- Please tell me about your own journey towards and commitment to an ecologically enlightened/ sustainable way of life.

The Role of Spirituality, Religion, Spiritual Formation

- How has your faith contributed to your decision to pursue sustainability?
- How has spirituality contributed to your decision to pursue sustainability? What specific practices contributed?
- How has religion contributed to your decision to pursue sustainability? What specific practices contributed?

Open-ended questions are “nondirectional” and “start with words such as ‘what’ or ‘how,’” yet they often are accompanied by sub-questions designed to “cover the anticipated needs for information” (Creswell, 1998, p. 99 and 101). I developed a series of topical sub-questions for many of the open-ended questions to ensure a thorough and complete response from the participant. These sub-questions were developed from a review of the parallel literature on sustainability, specifically works that explored how people became committed to a sustainable way of life (Appendix H). While I did not want to guide participants’ responses, I also wanted to

explore how Christian journeys toward sustainability were similar or dissimilar to those noted in previous academic literature. These sub-questions were presented as simple probes as well as actual questions; for example (excerpted from the Interview Guide):

Please tell me about your own journey towards and commitment to an ecologically enlightened/ sustainable way of life. This is an open-ended prompt, but the following categories provide potential probes:

- a. Influential experiences
- b. Numinous encounters or other times of revelation
- c. Connection to nature
- d. Role models or mentors
- e. Family influence/experiences
- f. Educational experiences
- g. Books, stories, or events
- h. Times of reflection
- i. Role of ritual, ceremony
- j. Rule of life, creed, personal philosophy, guiding norms, personal plan

Clarifying and deepening questions if they are not covered in the preceding response:

- a. When did you first become interested in sustainability?
- b. How did you happen to become interested? How did you get started on your journey? Could you describe the event or events that led up to this conscious commitment for you? Were there any particular formative experiences?
- c. Was there a precipitating event—a tipping point so to speak—that prompted this interest?
- d. What role, if any, did “life crisis” or a period of “forced introspection” play in your decision to become more sustainable?
- e. How long have you been attempting to live a sustainable life?
- f. Can you describe (or, is there anything else you would like to add about...) your progression from less to more sustainable?

The Interview Guide in Appendix G provides additional details.

A semi-structured approach offers the benefit of providing a framework for interviewing, while not constricting flexibility as new information or investigative directions arise. The interview guide for this study maintained its overall form and content, but evolved over the course of the investigation to accommodate the emerging theory. New questions that arose

during the course of the study provided vital clarifying information and are indicated in the Interview Guide.

Each interview unfolded from the first open-ended question about their journey towards and commitment to an ecologically enlightened/ sustainable way of life. I gave the interviewee sufficient opportunity to talk at will offering gentle probes if they seemed stuck or were having difficulties recalling information. Primarily, I participated as an active listener and recorder, and occasionally used gentle facilitation skills to ensure respondents stayed on track, addressing the subject and not venturing too far off topic. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. I also took notes during the interviews.

### **Conducting In-Person Interviews**

I conducted in-depth, in-person interviews with each research participant whenever possible. This enabled me to observe and gauge the level of sustainability and spiritual commitment first hand and get a sense of the interviewee's personality and way of being in the day-to-day world. My preference was to visit people in their homes and I was able to do this with four participants. I interviewed two at their places of work. Another, I was able to interview while participating in a week-long Holy Week retreat, called "Celebrate Easter with Earth;" he was co-leading with another interviewee. I was able to interact with three interviewees during the *Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism* conference at Yale Divinity School.

These in-person visits provided a means for me to informally check the validity of each subject's response and authenticity. Three interviews were conducted by telephone but each interviewee had a well-documented sustainability profile and I felt confident that the nomination

process, information written about and by the participant, and their answers to the interview questions validated their suitability as role models.

All research participants were given a research summary, interview guide, and informed consent letter in advance of our time together. I started the interviews with introductions and provided the opportunity for the interviewee to ask questions. Typically, we shared some informal conversation as a means of getting acquainted with each other. In my professional career I have conducted dozens of interviews and find it important to establish a rapport with each interviewee to ensure they are comfortable with me, with the topic, and with the location where we are conducting the interview. I find it helpful to employ a conversational style and to share my genuine interest and passion about the topic with each interviewee. More than once interviewees have commented on my engaging style and I feel fortunate to have established a comfortable rapport with each of the research participants in this study. We felt comfortable with each other during the interviews and I had no hesitation maintaining contact with them afterward. Several of the interviewees and I maintain close connection.

A testimony to the comfortable rapport established and shared throughout the interviews was their length and depth. My intention was that each interview would last about 90 minutes. I gave each participant the option to stop at 90 minutes or whenever they wanted. However, 100 percent of the participants were engaged in the questions such that they provided in-depth responses and expressed desire to continue the interviews beyond the allotted time frame. Many of them thanked me and expressed that they enjoyed reflecting on and sharing their stories—for some, it was the first time anyone had expressed interest. The result was information rich interviews sometimes lasting between two to three hours. Because I kept interviewees focused, these long interviews did not result in tangential or shallow information. On the contrary, each

interviewee provided thoughtful and deep responses to questions of faith, spiritual practice, and sustainability.

After each interview, I wrote up interview highlights, prepared interview transcripts, and began coding results. The constant comparison of data and theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) informed the next round of interviews. Where I needed clarification or supplemental information, I followed up with telephone calls and/or email inquiries. Using this approach, I was able to complete all interviews over a seven-month period (November 2007 through May 2008).

### **Recording and Managing Data**

All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder (and “old fashioned” tape recorder backup). I asked the interviewee for permission to record the interview and managed their responses and personal information according to the specifications outlined in the Informed Consent letter.

During each interview, I took detailed notes in addition to the tape recordings. These notes focused on capturing major ideas, key phrases, and other elements demonstrating the richness of each response. I find note-taking an excellent way to listen critically, record observations like body language, and to highlight various parts of the interview, such as times when the informant seemed most animated and/or emphatic. After the interview, I reviewed and refined the interview notes to create a complete account of the interviewee responses.

A time consuming but vital part of data management was transcribing each interview. I completed all transcription by hand myself. Line-by-line transcription provided me with intimate engagement with the data and I came to know each interviewee’s story very well

through the hours I spent transcribing their words. This kind of in-depth familiarity with the data through manual transcription provides the data immersion required for the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

I submitted interview transcripts and other summary information (especially participant profiles) to the research participants for review, possible comment and modification, and validation. Providing the opportunity for research participants to review transcripts and my descriptive write-ups about them provided a valuable means to ensure I accurately heard and captured their responses and intent. The transcripts developed from each interview provided the basis for later coding.

### **Textual Data**

Many of the research participants included in this study had produced documentation about their sustainability journeys, such as published articles, books, written responses to my interview questions, and other written materials. In addition, some participants were the subject of articles and published interviews. These textual materials formed a supporting data source for my inquiry in addition to the interview transcripts. After a careful evaluation of these materials to discern their quality, applicability, and context, appropriate written materials were included as a data source. While not analyzed as thoroughly as the transcripts (i.e., not formally coded), they were examined for supporting data and possible new open and axial codes (Charmaz, 2006).

Charmaz (2006) makes a distinction between elicited and extant texts, both of which were considered for my study:

- Elicited: Text, such as written responses to interview questions, which result from a research participant preparing something in response to the researcher's request.

- Extant: A variety of written materials, such as public records, government reports, literature, and letters, related to the study that the researcher had no hand in shaping: “Researchers treat extant texts as data to address their research questions although these texts were produced for other—often very different—purposes” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 35).

A wide variety of extant sources informed my study. Each was screened using the question-based criteria proposed by Charmaz (2006) to ensure the sources were trust-worthy, applicable, reliable, and of good quality, in addition to some of the following considerations about context:

- On what and whose facts does this information rest?
- What does the information mean to the various participants or actors in the scene?
- What does the information leave out?
- Who has access to ... the information?
- Who is the intended audience of the information?
- Who benefits from shaping and/or interpreting this information in a particular way?
- How was the text produced? By whom?
- Which realities does the text claim to represent? How does it represent them?
- Who benefits from the text? Why? (p. 37-40).

One form of extant source that I used in my study was published interviews and articles about some of my research participants. In addition, several of my research participants had written books and/or articles, or had Web sites, that I included in my research. Another very important category of extant sources was the numerous open and pastoral letters, calls to action, declarations, covenants, resolutions and other written materials prepared by religious institutions and a variety of interfaith organizations calling for ecological awakening, ecological conversion, stewardship, and a sustainable way of life. These provided a summary of what some of the most noteworthy national and internationally focused religious and spiritual organizations hold up as

the vision and goals for an ecologically enlightened and sustainable life. These views helped me frame the issue and establish benchmarks to better understand and evaluate my participants' responses and commitment.

## **PARTICIPANT INTRODUCTIONS**

This section briefly introduces the research participants in my study. Here you will glimpse who they were at the time of the study (fall 2007 through spring 2008): geographic location, religious perspectives, educational background, a sense of their work in the world, and other demographic data. Table 1 provides summary demographic information.

The ups, downs, twists and turns of the role model's journeys are covered in the next two chapters. Chapter 4 provides a much longer biographical sketch of each participant's journey to ecological enlightenment and a sustainable way of life. It provides an overview of origins, threshold moments, guides and guideposts, and the overall trajectory of the trail. Chapter 5 describes the participants in the context of open and axial codes (i.e., key themes/categories and descriptive properties) comprising the heart of this grounded theory investigation. Chapter 5 focuses on what is unique about the journeys of Christian sustainability role models. Illustrative quotes from each participant are used to illustrate these thematic categories and properties.

### **Jennifer Aiosa**

Jenn, a 36 year old single female, is the Maryland Senior Scientist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. Her work is based in Annapolis, MD and she currently lives in Baltimore. Jenn approaches sustainability personally, professionally, and in her community work to support local parks. She models sustainability in many ways especially through her choice to be a practicing

**Table 1. Research Participant Demographic Summary**

<b>Name</b>  <b>Home Location</b> <b>(Interview</b> <b>Date)</b>	<b>Religion</b>  <b>(Faith</b> <b>Descriptor)</b>	<b>Age</b>  <b>(Personal</b> <b>Status)</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Vocation</b>
Jenn Aiosa  Baltimore, MD (12/13/2007)	Catholic lay; presently unaffiliated (Eco-Justice)	36  Single	Masters, Environmental Science	MD Senior Scientist for Chesapeake Bay Foundation
C.P.  Near St. Louis, MO (3/22/2008)	Catholic religious/priest (Creation spirituality)	47  Single, member religious community	Seminary (ordained priest) and Undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies. Extensive training at Genesis Farm.	Priest, retreat leader, Director Oblate Ecological Initiative and La Vista Ecological Learning Center
Cal DeWitt  Near Madison, WI (3/10/2008)	Evangelical, Reformed tradition (Stewardship)	Early 70s (born 1935)  Married, adult children	Ph.D., Zoology	Professor, U. of Wisconsin Nelson Center for Environmental Studies
Joyce DiBenedetto- Colton  Miami, FL (11/15/2007)	Raised Methodist/Catholi c, now spiritual unaffiliated (Creation spirituality)	56  Married, adult children	M.S., Adult Education; Grad Certificates in Public Health and Environmental Studies	Adjunct faculty, Core Council member Earth Ethics Institute, Miami Dade College; workshop leader
Margaret Galiardi  Long Island, NY (1/9/2008)	Catholic religious (Creation spirituality)	61  Single, member religious community	M.A. in Theology	Educator, retreat leader
Joel and Stephan Hill  Westminster, VT (11/14/2007)	Episcopalian (Eco-Justice)	(J) 71 (S) 72  Married, adult children	(J) M.S. Organization Development (S) M.S. in Organization Development; and a JD	(J) Retired, volunteer Deacon at St. Michael's Episcopal Church, Brattleboro, VT (S) Retired

<b>Name</b> <b>Home Location</b> <b>(Interview Date)</b>	<b>Religion</b> <b>(Faith Descriptor)</b>	<b>Age</b> <b>(Personal Status)</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Vocation</b>
Jan Lorah Sunset Beach, NC (12/10/2007)	Presbyterian, converting to Orthodox (Stewardship)	55  Single (divorced), adult child	B.A. Sociology and certificate of theology; training in spiritual direction	Hospital chaplain; former Director of <i>EcoStewards</i> Alliance nonprofit
Rob Schnabel Annapolis, MD (12/12/2007)	Quaker (Eco-justice)	40  Married, young children	Undergraduate Environmental Sciences and History	Watershed Restoration Scientist/ Chesapeake Streams Manager, Chesapeake Bay Foundation
Nancy Sleeth Wilmer, KY (3/12/2008)	Evangelical, presently attending small non-denominational church (Stewardship)	47  Married, adult (college age) children	Masters Journalism	Co-director/founder <i>Blessed Earth</i> nonprofit
Gail Worcelo Greensboro, VT (3/5/2008)	Catholic religious (Creation spirituality)	48  Single, member religious community	Masters Clinical Psychology; Masters Christian Spirituality	Religious sister; co-founder Green Mountain Monastery; retreat leader, educator

vegetarian and in her efforts to sustainably renovate her historic Baltimore row house, including adding solar panels.

Jenn was raised and lived most of her life as a Catholic, but she recently feels alienated from the institutional church and has stopped regular attendance. However, she still considers herself Christian and spiritual. Her primary spiritual practice is a conscious practice of gratitude. Jenn holds an Environmental Science Masters Degree and has always had an interest in science, especially related to water resources.

### **Catholic Priest (C.P.)**

Since childhood, C.P. has had a passion for environmental studies and religion. His vocation has unfolded in a way that enables him to do both. He is an ordained Catholic Priest and also has an undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies. He considers a vital part of his ecological and religious formation to be a two-week Earth Literacy program he attended at Genesis Farm in 1997 and the two-year internship that followed. From 1998-1999 C.P. interned at Genesis Farm, one year with the Earth Literacy Center and one year with the Community Supported Garden.

C.P. is co-founder and current Director of the La Vista Ecological Learning Center and community supported agriculture (CSA) in Godfrey, Illinois on the beautiful bluffs of the Mississippi River. He is also Director of the Oblate Ecological Initiative, “part of the ongoing effort of the Congregation to respond to the priority of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation” (Oblate web site). This initiative includes the Ecological Learning Center and CSA.

C.P. approaches sustainability at multiple levels. His personal focus is on food: modeling earth-friendly vegetarian habits at his community and fostering community supported agriculture. C.P. also is a preacher, retreat leader, teacher around themes of earth literacy and the “new” story all around the country. I met him at a Holy Week retreat in South Carolina that I attended as a participant. The retreat theme echoed C.P.’s passions: by “Celebrating Easter with Earth,” C.P. wove together themes of traditional Christian theology with the “new” cosmology (discussed more in Chapter 4).

## **Calvin DeWitt**

When you consider the question of religion, environment, and action a name that routinely surfaces is that of Dr. Calvin DeWitt, a leading Evangelical and scientist with immense reach and influence. In an interview for *Grist* magazine, David Roberts frames the breadth of Cal's work: "No one has worked longer at the intersection of environmental science, evangelical ethics, and practical activism than Calvin DeWitt" (David Roberts, 2006).

Cal was born in 1935 and has been interested in science and the creation for over 60 years. His "passionate pursuit of wonder" led him to advanced degrees in Biology and Zoology and a long and distinguished teaching, writing, and speaking career. He is presently a professor with the Nelson Center for Environmental Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Cal's research interests are broad, encompassing national expertise on the desert iguana (the study of which helped to hone his commitment to sustainability—see Chapter 4) and International leadership in making the Christian case for creation care. His sustainability reach also stretches from the personal to international scope. Cal helped his local community develop a land conservation plan and considers himself steward of a 1,000 acre wetland preserve he helped conserve. He also co-founded the Evangelical Environmental Network, an extremely influential national and international organization responsible for some important environmental action, most recently initiatives on climate change and care of creation. Cal considers religion "very important" to his sustainability efforts and is a long-time member of the Christian Reformed Church.

### **Joyce Dibenedetto-Colton**

Joyce is a 56 year old Italian-American woman from the Miami suburbs, who also routinely retreats to a one-room off-grid log cabin in Tennessee at the Narrow Ridge earth literacy community. She has a life-long connection to earth and spirit and has formed most of her career around those passions. She is the Former Director of the Earth Ethics Institute (EEI) at Miami Dade College (MDC), and now adjunct faculty and Core Council member of the EEI. She also has a strong animal rights sensibility and has served as the Coordinator for the College's Animal Ethics Study Center.

Joyce's primary sustainability practice centers around organic food gardening and vegetarian cooking/eating. She works at the community level, too—as a resource for others interested in organic gardening, vegetarianism, and other topics on ecological living and she established a Miami chapter of EarthSave International.

Joyce was raised with a variety of Christian perspectives, primarily Catholic and Methodist, and now practices a more personal spirituality that recognizes the “sacred in all things.” She practices living meditation, especially observing “twilight and waking awareness.” Joyce and her husband of twenty-five years soon plan to retire to their one-room log cabin in the woods of East Tennessee.

### **Margaret Galiardi**

Sister Margaret Galiardi, Amityville (New York) Dominican, is a 61 year old Catholic Sister who entered the religious life at the age of nineteen. In her community life she's had many roles, with a long-term focus on social justice that radically transformed to a broader earth perspective (eco-justice) during a Death Valley vision quest in her 54<sup>th</sup> year.

Margaret has a Masters Degree in Theology from Notre Dame University in South Bend, Indiana and considers herself as “someone who is trying to practice theology, ” meaning: “being involved in actively implementing a worldview that is consistent with a kind of single sacred community of life.” Margaret wrote that her present focus “on an Earth-based eco-spirituality” has her offering “lectures, retreats and workshops, nationally on such topics as ‘The New Cosmology’ and ‘Re-telling the Christian Story in Light of the Larger Universe Story’” (Galiardi 2008 p. v). She recently developed a new course on “God and Darwin.” Margaret also consults with the Center for Earth Jurisprudence, a Florida-based organization that seeks the “re-envisioning of law and governance from an Earth-centered perspective” (Galiardi 2008 p. v). Margaret is influential in her local community and seeks to re-introduce people to the nature of Long Island and promote ecological living as much as she can.

### **Joel and Stephan Hill**

Joel and Stephan are a retired married couple. My intent was to interview Joel who is an active Deacon in my local Episcopal Church in Brattleboro, Vermont. However, when I arrived at her home for the interview it became clear her sustainability journey was interwoven with that of her long-time husband and partner.

Stephan describes himself as a 72 year old retired teacher with a long interest in sustainability who is finally, after moving to Vermont from over 20 years in Maryland, living “where he can live the lifestyle he’s, over a period of years, developed more and more for himself.” His wife Joel is a 71 year old woman retired from Johns Hopkins where she was faculty administrator/Project coordinator for half dozen very large population/community projects (School of Public Health). Both are former Peace Corps Volunteers. Joel has a Masters

Degree in Organizational Development; Stephan a Masters in Organizational Development and a JD.

This off-grid couple has many sustainability actions they could highlight. Certainly Stephan took great delight in showing me his solar photovoltaic system and battery storage area, but both agree they are most proud of being “on this road” (meaning on the sustainability road, though after personally navigating the treacherous mountain dirt road where they live, they could rightly say they were proud of living on that road, too). Joel is far more active in the church than her husband, although both are long-time Episcopalians. Stephan’s sense of spirituality derives from intentional time outdoors—this is clearly a man who loves communing with the natural world. Joel shares that interest and also studies scripture in her role as Deacon at St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Brattleboro, VT and as a biblical storyteller.

### **Jan Lorah**

Jan is someone who describes herself as a person who “loves to engage in conversations concerning global warming and choices for sustainability—as well as take long leisurely walks on the seashore of Sunset Beach, North Carolina where she currently resides.” She says she “has personally learned the value of healing through spirituality, art and nature” (Lorah, 2007, biography from the Institute for Nature and Leadership).

Jan’s sustainability and spiritual journey took an unexpected and ultimately deeper turn beginning in 2005 where for several years she faced the death of many close relatives. This helped her clarify her focus and she massively down-sized her life from a moderate home in Fairfax County, Virginia to the small “gypsy wagon” she now inhabits in North Carolina. Along

with this downsizing, her commitment to her faith, her spiritual practices, and her ethic of voluntary simplicity deepened.

As the former managing director of EcoStewards Alliance and study circle coordinator of the Chesapeake Earth Institute, Jan spread the gospel of voluntary simplicity and sustainability. Now she remains “ambassador-at-large for the Northwest Earth Institute” and is affiliated with the Institute for Nature and Leadership (J. Lorah, personal communication, December 10, 2007). Environmental ministry of various types is a key part of Jan. The upheaval in her life also led her in the summer of 2008 to enroll in an extended training program to become a spiritual director. She has been a teacher, hospital chaplain, and environmental minister at her former Presbyterian Church. With her move to the beach, she rediscovered nature as church and is deepening her commitment to the Orthodox religion, a new religious path she is exploring in part because it offers a greater commitment to earth care than what she experienced in her former Protestant church.

### **Rob Schnabel**

Rob is a 40 year-old father and husband with two young children. He and his family live in historic Annapolis, Maryland in a small historic row house he is retrofitting to demonstrate how downtown history can be preserved with modern energy efficiency. Rob is the Maryland Restoration Biologist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and tries to “let his life speak” (referencing the motto of George Fox, founder of his Quaker faith) of his commitment to sustainability in all ways. He is a very conscious consumer and attempts to live “being aware of how your everyday decisions from everything—from getting to work, to eating, volunteering in a community setting, getting involved politically with local decisions, just with all of that” affects

the earth (R. Schnabel, personal communication, December, 12, 2007). His ethics were significantly shaped through Quakerism and he has an ongoing practice of quiet reflection in the manner of Quaker meetings, although he is more inclined to take this time outdoors than through regular attendance at a meeting.

### **Nancy Sleeth**

A series of tragic cancer deaths at the local hospital where Nancy's husband Matthew worked as a doctor kicked off full-blown Christian conversion experiences that shaped them as Evangelical role models of sustainable living. Matthew documented their journey in his 2006 book, *Serve God, Save the Planet*. My interview was with Nancy, a co-equal partner with Matthew in their sustainability work. Some of Matthew's writings are included in my dissertation to illustrate additional perspectives and to demonstrate the true partnership these two have. Both have committed their lives, post-conversion, to serving God and the planet. Nancy, a former English teacher, co-directs their nonprofit organization *Blessed Earth*, supports Matthew with his writing and speaking, as well as doing her own projects. Since our interview, Nancy has written her own book, *Go Green, Save Green: A Simple Guide to Saving Time, Money, and God's Green Earth* that was published in 2009.

Their story of transformation from "typical doctor's family" to sustainability role models is inspirational and touches every aspect of their lives. In all they do, they are guided deeply by their faith and supported through numerous spiritual practices. Their influence is broad, stretching from the home to the nation. Their two adult children (Clark 19 and Emma 17) also are committed to the path (e.g., Emma has written her own book, *It's Easy Being Green* and Clark is committed to becoming a missionary doctor). Nationally, they are invited to teach and

preach at churches of all kinds. Nancy estimates they've reached tens of thousands in just a few years. Nancy is 47 and Matthew 51. She has an English undergraduate and Masters in Journalism. They currently live in Kentucky.

### **Gail Worcelo**

This 48-year old Catholic Sister was a Passionist nun of St. Gabriel's Monastery near Scranton, Pennsylvania for 25 years before being given permission by her community "to begin a new monastery community with guidance from her mentor Passionist priest Father Thomas Berry" (Worcelo, 2007 web). She is now co-foundress and Sister of Green Mountain Monastery in Greensboro, Vermont. She has two Masters Degrees (Clinical Psychology and Christian Spirituality) and has been mentored by Thomas Berry since 1984. She is an international teacher, retreat leader, and speaker on the new cosmology, the universe story, and the relationship of these with the history of religious life and Christian theology. On the web site for Green Mountain Monastery, Gail writes of her vision to bring "the Catholic religious tradition into its cosmological phase":

We are a 21st century monastery in the Catholic monastic tradition.

Rooted in the long lineage of this tradition we engage with it at this new "Moment of Grace," as it enters into its cosmological/planetary phase.

We do this by understanding ourselves within the larger context of the Universe Story and by committing [sic] ourselves whole heartedly to the protection of Earth and to Transformation in Christ Consciousness for the Sake of the Whole (Worcelo, 2008).

Gail's spiritual practices are many and seek to engage/align mind, heart, and body. She is a liturgical dancer, meditator, and has a strong practice of ongoing reading and study. She considers "development of the interior" to be essential for cultivating a sustainable life path.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The most important step of qualitative data analysis is “reading, reading, and reading once more through the data” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p. 153) with the intent of first becoming intimately familiar with the data through repeated immersion (through reading and/or listening to the interview tapes), then sorting, coding, and comparing the data. This is a process that takes the whole story provided in the interview and extant text, fragments it into its component parts—the open and axial codes—then pulls it back together again as a preliminary theory (Charmaz, 2006). This process guided my approach; the first tasks involved transcribing the raw data and beginning the coding process.

### **Transcribing**

I manually transcribed each interview, capturing each word in a Microsoft Word Document. Although there are software packages available to assist transcribing and coding, my preference after working with dozens of interviews over the course of my academic and professional career is to work with the data personally and by hand.

I reviewed the data as I was transcribing to ensure that I accurately captured the interviewee’s words. In addition, I reviewed printed copies of each transcribed interview multiple times—first in a general edit and then through the coding process. This ensured that I accurately captured information from the interview. Whenever something—whether a word or phrase—seemed awkward or out of place, I returned to the recorded transcript to check for accuracy. Fortunately, the recordings were of high quality and it was possible to make out almost all of the interviewee’s words.

Because I had taken detailed notes during the interview, I also compared my notes to the transcriptions to make sure I had captured information correctly. Once this iterative self-check was completed I performed two additional accuracy checks. I sent the edited transcripts to the research participants for his or her review and comment. I also had a professional colleague review half of my transcripts for accuracy.

### **Coding**

After transcribing, I began data analysis on each detailed interview transcript, using grounded theory methods of immersion, coding, sorting, and constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). I initiated the process with the *Lectio Divina* approach of reading through (and listening to) the interviews over and over again to get a deep sense of the content. Then, I began formal coding. Primarily I coded interview transcripts, but I also reviewed extant sources, especially several books and articles prepared by the research participants (identified as appropriate later in the dissertation). The full transcripts were coded line-by-line as a thorough means of evaluating the data and developing open and axial codes. I used a focused coding approach for the extant materials. Table 2 provides a summary of the open and axial codes developed for my study.

**Table 2. Open and Axial Codes**

<b>OPEN CODES INDICATED IN BOLD CAPS; Axial codes are lower case and not bold.</b> Not all open codes have axial codes.
<b>LED BY FAITH</b>
1) Faith as <i>Assensus</i> , faith as belief 2) Faith as <i>Fiducia</i> , faith as trust, radical trust in God 3) Faith as <i>Fidelitas</i> , faith as “fidelity,” faithfulness to our relationship with God. 4) Faith as <i>Visio</i> , faith as a way of seeing.
<b>CONTEXT</b>
1) The Universe 2) Ecological Understanding 3) Deep Time 4) Creators of a New Context 5) Communion of Subjects
<b>CALL WITHIN A CALL</b> (Spiritual and environmental calls are interrelated.)
<b>ALIGNMENT</b> (Alignment of head, body, heart; alignment of will and action.)
<b>FOUNDATIONS</b>
Childhood Experiences 1) Early exposure to nature 2) Early exposure to animals 3) Early numinous encounter (e.g., mystical early connection to the Sacred Other/God) 4) Early role models (mentors, teachers, community, family)
Numinous Encounters in Nature (after childhood)
Quality Time in Nature as an Adult
Conversion
Responding To/Experiencing Loss
Teachers/mentors (After Childhood) Being influenced by teachers and mentors (living or historic; note: Jesus is coded under FAITH) or, Being a teacher and/or mentor to others (spreading the Word)
Fellowship/community. Related to this Fellowship/community axial code (and to be coded with it) is Relationship To Place (because, for many of these informants, community is not limited to people).
<b>INTENTION</b>
<b>PRACTICE</b>
Inward Disciplines/Practices 1) Meditation And Reflection 2) Prayer (Encompasses all forms of prayer except contemplative prayer which would be included under meditation.) 3) Fasting (This includes standard religious fasts such as observed on special Holy Days like Good Friday, but also the vision quest ceremony)

<b>OPEN CODES INDICATED IN BOLD CAPS; Axial codes are lower case and not bold.</b> Not all open codes have axial codes.	
4) Study	
Outward Disciplines/Practices	
1) Simplicity	
2) Solitude	
3) Submission	
4) Service: Note the Service sub-theme includes as a subset the themes of <b>DISCERNING CALL</b> in order to better serve the Lord. So, aspects of the interview associated with call and call and <b>STEWARDSHIP</b> can be coded here. Also under the <b>SERVICE</b> sub-theme is the notion of “calls within calls—the religious call and the ecological/sustainability call” but it was so important as to also be a separate coded category.	
5) Being a Movement Initiator: This is related to service, but taken to a higher level. Some of these informants follow the role of Jesus to the point of starting new movements (e.g., the Evangelical Environmental Network; the first Ecozoic Monastery).	
Corporate Disciplines/Practices	
1) Confession	
2) Worship	
3) Guidance	
4) Celebration	
Other Practices: This category includes other spiritual practices informants might mention, such as art, music, labyrinth, etc., not encompassed by Foster’s framework.	
<b>COMPASSION AND JUSTICE</b> (Note, this is related to submission and service but is coded separately)	
<b>COMPASSION FOR SELF AND ALL BEINGS</b> (This includes humility and nonjudgment and having a strong sense of social justice)	
<b>FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT</b>	
<b>GRACE IN COOPERATION WITH HUMAN WILL</b> (or, CO-CREATION WITH HOLY MYSTERY)	

## Open Codes

My first step was to read through the data to develop overarching categories or open codes. These set the broad framework for subsequent coding. This process required both a broad and narrow lens: I needed to contemplate the whole story, provided through participant responses to the interview questions, in order to identify patterns. These patterns, like puzzle pieces, enabled me to break apart the whole into discrete parts—some parts are related to each other and some are unique. The highest level patterns form the open codes.

My first coding engagement with the data was to immerse myself with the transcripts so that I could identify words, phrases, and concepts corresponding to the open codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Using a color-coding strategy, I identified and grouped together conceptually similar information to form collections of similar data streams that comprised the open codes. The open codes identify the key phenomena of the research and are essential to laying a solid foundation for the grounded theory method. I was fortunate to have a professional colleague independently check my coding approach. Where discrepancies were identified, they were discussed and reconciled.

### **Axial Codes**

Once I complete the initial coding, I went back through the data several times to refine them by identifying descriptive properties for each open code. Specifically, I used a numeric coding strategy to identify discrete axial codes that helped to clarify, provide context for, and otherwise frame the open codes. Axial codes are characterized by Strauss (1987, p. 64 as cited in Charmaz, 2006, p. 60) as comprising “a dense texture of relationships around the axis of a category” whereby “initial [open] coding fractures and axial coding begins to bring the pieces back together as a whole” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 60). As with the open codes, I reviewed and reconciled my axial codes with an independent reviewer.

### **Focused Coding**

Several of my research participants had written books and articles, prepared descriptive web sites, and/or been featured in others’ books and articles. These provided valuable sources of information to supplement the detailed transcript coding. With these extant sources, I employed

focused or selective coding that enabled me to sort through the large amounts of data in these books and articles. Focused coding essentially “means using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes” to scan through additional data quickly with an eye on finding information related to those codes (Charmaz, 2006). It does not imply developing new codes as one does with the open and axial coding process. Sometimes, however, during focused coding a researcher will identify new patterns worthy of separate coding.

### **Sorting Data**

After each interview, I immediately began the coding process. This enabled me to develop a preliminary set of open and axial codes early in the analytical process that I used to sort future data. For each subsequent data source, I reviewed the material and sorted segments of text into the appropriate coded category. The first sorting step was to see if the data fit into pre-existing categories. Once data were aligned with existing categories, the remaining data were evaluated as to whether they warranted a new code or to determine if they were tangential to the analysis. This process went on until all new data fit into a pre-existing category—theoretical saturation.

### **Memo Writing**

After coding was completed, I explored the open and axial codes to develop preliminary theories about the data. An effective technique for doing this is memo writing, defined by Charmaz (2006) as, “a critical part of grounded theory methodology” that provides the “pivotal intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 42). Memos are summaries of essential information that often start with observations and “writing about our

codes and data” and lead to “theoretical categories” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 72). Basically, memos are the researcher’s notes that help to sort and make sense of emerging data. Memo writing helps researchers “grapple with ideas, set an analytical course, refine categories, define relationships among various categories, and gain a sense of confidence and competence in their ability to analyze data” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 517).

I used memo writing throughout my research process, beginning as soon as I collected and began to analyze my first round of interview data. My memos took the form of summary tables, clustered groups of quotes, narrative discussion about the findings, and journal writing. In addition, other data forms like documents provided by my research subjects were evaluated and incorporated into the memos to help sort out and clarify the data.

I followed Charmaz’s (2006, pp. 80-81) approach to memo preparation, especially her guiding questions, when developing my memos. She distinguished between early and more advanced versions of memos.

Early memos address “what you see happening in the data” and help the researcher “to explore and fill out [her] qualitative codes” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 80). In particular, early memos help the researcher look for processes that provide the focus for many grounded theories, including my study—the process of becoming ecologically enlightened and committed to a sustainable way of life (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 80-81):

- What process is at issue here?
- Under which conditions does this process develop?
- How do(es) the research participant(s) think, feel, and act while involved in this process?

- When, why, and how does the process change?
- What are the consequences of the process?

Advanced memos move toward theory development by tracing and categorizing data, describing how data emerges, and making comparisons (describing the outcomes of the constant comparison approach; Charmaz, 2006, p. 81).

I developed thorough, well-titled and analyzed memos in order to prepare the foundation for robust dissertation chapters and subsequent papers (Charmaz, 2006). Memo writing is a form of data integration that often leads to publication or other written presentations of the data. The memos also helped me develop participant profiles. In addition, I shared early memos with an outside reviewer and members of my Dissertation Committee as a means of checking my data analysis and interpretation. Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend the use of storyline memos that begin integrating various concepts that address the question, “What seems to be going on here?” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 148). I found storyline memos to be an effective tool for pulling together discrete concepts into a linked assemblage of ideas that framed my initial theory.

## **TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE DATA**

The grounded theory methodology employs systematic strategies, such as constant comparison and theoretical sampling, to ensure that good quality data are collected and analyzed. Unlike quantitative methodologies where the emphasis is placed on data verification, grounded theory, as a qualitative method of the interpretive tradition is better considered as offering preliminary hypotheses, “confirming emergent ideas” and providing “plausible accounts” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 132); it is not a verification method. This does not minimize the utility of the data at all, but it must be understood in the context of which it was collected and analyzed.

My sampling methodology follows recommendations by Charmaz (2006) and Morrow and Smith (1995) for a constructivist approach “oriented toward assessing the viability (utility) as opposed to the validity (truth) of an individual’s unique worldview” (Neimeyer and Neimeyer, 1993, p. 2 as cited in Morrow and Smith, 1995, p. 25). Data that emerge, or are “discovered” through a constructivist grounded theory are co-created from the research participant’s memory and reflective capability as well as the researcher’s listening and interpretive skills—“the ‘discovered’ reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural, and structural contexts. Researchers and subjects frame that interaction and confer meaning upon it” (Charmaz, 2000, p. 524).

Constructivist grounded theory provides an effective means of presenting a preliminary theory that can be elaborated on by others in different contexts. Therefore, it is essential that the data are trustworthy and the methods well documented and carefully followed. I employed a number of approaches to ensure the trustworthiness and quality of my data collection and analysis.

Finding the proper research participants was an important first step in ensuring trustworthy data—it was essential that my interviewees met the broad criteria of this study and were truly “walking the talk” of ecological consciousness and commitment to a sustainable way of life. My use of expert nominators—scholars and practitioners in my field of study—was critical for finding qualified and trustworthy research participants. This was strengthened by having each interviewee affirm their fit with the study. Together, these two steps provided adequate screening for a constructivist approach and supported development of trustworthy data. Although I accepted research candidate’s self-identification and screening at face value, by planning in-person interviews, especially if at each interviewee’s home or place of work, I was

afforded an additional level of screening through observation. I also searched the Web for materials by and about them and asked specific questions about their sustainability practices.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I kept in mind the criteria proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) and summarized by Creswell (1998) for evaluating the quality of a grounded theory study. These quality criteria provided the benchmark against which I continuously evaluated my data and approach to analysis:

- Criterion #1: How was the original sample selected? What grounds?
- Criterion #2: What major categories emerged?
- Criterion #3: What were some of the events, incidents, actions, and so on (as indicators) that pointed to some of these major categories?
- Criterion #4: On the basis of what categories did theoretical sampling proceed? Guide data collection? Was it representative of the categories?
- Criterion #5: What were some of the hypotheses pertaining to conceptual relations (that is, among categories), and on what grounds were they formulated and tested?
- Criterion #6: Were there instances when hypotheses did not hold up against what was actually seen? How were these discrepancies accounted for? How did they affect the hypotheses?
- Criterion #7: How and why was the core category selected (sudden, gradual, difficult, easy)? On what grounds? (as cited in Creswell, 1998, pp. 209-210).

Kvale (1996) identified additional questions on interview verification that helped inform my quality review process:

What checks were conducted of the reliability of interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing? What controls were made for counteracting biased and selective interpretations? What are the arguments for the validity of the findings? (p. 264).

Additional strategies I employed to ensure the trustworthiness of my data included the following:

- **Submitted interview questions to the participants in advance of our meeting** to ensure they would have adequate time to reflect back on their experiences and be prepared to thoughtfully share them with me.
- **Conducted most in-person interviews where possible** so I could visually observe and confirm their level of commitment. For the three interviews I conducted by telephone, I had sufficient documentation and reliable nominators to assure the suitability of the research participant for this study.
- **Conducted review iterations with interviewees (i.e., “member-checking,” Creswell, 2003, p. 196).** As described, I asked research participants to review interview transcripts, biographical sketches, and my overall coding schema.
- **Independent review (i.e., “peer debriefing,” Creswell, 2003, p. 196).** I was able to have a coding partner independently review and code the data. When our approaches coincided, it added strength to my interpretation. Where we noticed differences, we discussed our two perspectives and were able to reconcile them. This peer debriefing was an integral part of my overall methodology and commitment to accurate non-biased and trustworthy data.
- **Advisor and Committee Review.** Review by my academic mentors was essential and kept me on track. This was a critical part of my research.
- **Audit Trail.** I prepared a coding schema document, along with memos and original coded transcripts, that provide an audit trail of critical information outlining the “research process and the evolution of codes, categories, and theories” (Miles and Huberman, 1984 quoted in Morrow and Smith, 1995, p. 26)—a key part of accountability. This information, plus my Methodology Chapter, would help other researchers understand and implement my approach, although data interpretations could differ.
- **Literature Review.** I thoroughly evaluated relevant literature to provide “supplemental validation” and triangulation (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2003). Written sources outside of my immediate study provided an objective means of reviewing my results—sometimes affirming the findings or pointing out how they differed from the published literature. These outside information sources helped me to “build a coherent justification for themes” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196).

### **Research Limitations**

My research design was sound and carefully followed grounded theory methodological guidelines (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In addition, I used a number of strategies to check the quality of my data and to build trustworthy results.

However, like all qualitative studies, the method inherently has limitations related to sample size and data collection and analysis techniques (Marshall and Rossman, 1999), including limitations on the ability to generalize the results, the depth of inquiry, and the reproducibility of the results.

### **Sample Size and Ability to Generalize**

Although I employed a constant comparison technique with theoretical sampling, hoping to achieve theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998), my sample size was limited in scope and representation (e.g., I focused on Christians). The goal of grounded theory is not to seek a representative sample, but to ensure the emerging codes are saturated (ideally) or close to saturated for the particular population and context of the study.

By not having a larger representative sample, some could argue that it is not possible to generalize the results of my research to other populations. Because the topics of sustainability and spirituality share common threads among religious traditions and throughout the Christian tradition, I expect to find aspects of the study that are generalizable and some that are not. The preliminary theory I developed from this research will need to be explored in future projects focusing on other individuals and groups in order to broaden the theoretical implications.

### **Depth of Inquiry**

Time limitations with each research participant made it difficult to obtain the breadth and depth of information I desired although all willingly participated in long and detailed interviews. In addition, participants were willing to review materials as appropriate and allowed me to ask follow-up questions. By engaging with the research participants in an iterative fashion after the initial interview (e.g., by offering them interview transcripts and summaries to review), I

provided additional opportunities to deepen the inquiry and the concern about depth was minimized.

### **Reproducibility**

I carefully followed accepted guidelines and took extra accountability steps such as using an independent coder/reviewer to limit any chance of personal bias or subjective interpretation. Nonetheless, qualitative studies produce findings that could be subject to other interpretations by a different researcher. My study methodology is well documented and reproducible, but data interpretation may not.

## CHAPTER 4

### ROLE MODEL PROFILES: JOURNEYING TO A SUSTAINABLE WAY OF LIFE

*As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. . . . This requires a change of mind and heart.*

(Earth Charter)

We arrived at the “critical moment where humanity must choose its future” from many different places of origin. Chapter 2 explored some of the important historical trails bringing us to this moment, especially certain anthropological, psychological, and philosophical perspectives and important “revolutions” in religion, science, technology, and economics. These broad historical routes marked the terrain for contemporary travelers; each person has a unique journey, but is guided by tangible and psychic traces of the former trail. In this chapter, we begin to explore each role model’s journey to his or her own “critical moment” and beyond. These are people who often started on a well-trod path, but broke off to pursue the less traveled way or to forge new ground.

Much of my professional career—as an environmental consultant and an eco-spiritual wilderness guide—centers on deep listening and meaning-making from peoples’ stories. In one instance I may conduct an interview project for a watershed client such as the Chesapeake Bay Program where I listen to program managers, government leaders, and community watershed organizers address critical evaluation questions of what works in the Program and what needs improving. In another, I may sit outdoors in a circle of people to listen deeply and mirror back each person’s story after they have completed a four day wilderness solo and fast.

After more than a decade of this practice, I believe stories offer the best way to learn. My personal path is deeply influenced by the stories I have heard and read, reflected on, and assimilated. Stories offer the power to transform the lives of the story teller and the listener.

Without question, I was deeply touched, inspired, and transformed by the stories I heard from my research participants.

In this chapter and the next I present each research participant's story of how they came to be ecologically enlightened and committed to a sustainable way of life. These two chapters are the heart of my dissertation. Here, I present biographical profiles for each role model using their own words as much as feasible, while providing context and maintaining balance between text and quotes (Kvale, 1996). The profiles in this chapter are presented in alphabetical order according to the participant's actual name with one exception, "C.P.," who desired to remain anonymous.

My interviews were information rich and I was blessed with comprehensive, thoughtful, and flavorful responses too extensive to profile in their entirety. Most of the role models led deeply reflective lives and some had written books and articles about their journeys. As a researcher and story lover, it was challenging to choose the most illustrative vignettes from such a piquant feast. So, I focus the profiles on each person's sustainability origins, their unfolding sustainability path, and trail markers and stepping stones along the way. I also provide limited illustrative examples of how they are sustainability role models and begin to explore the role of religion and/or spirituality. These profiles indicate who and where the role models were when I interviewed them over fall/winter 2007 and spring of 2008. Most of the content for the profiles came from the participants' responses to my overarching research prompts and questions:

- Please tell me about your own journey towards and commitment to an ecologically enlightened/ sustainable way of life.
- Some have described this kind of journey as an awakening, as becoming enlightened, or as an ecological conversion. Was this what it was like for you?

- How has religion and/or spirituality (e.g., particular beliefs, practices) contributed to your decision to pursue sustainability?
- For illustrative purposes, can you describe in what ways you feel that you lead a sustainable life? Is there an area you would like to highlight?

While remaining “faithful to the words of the participants,” I laced together key concepts into a more coherent whole, made transitions so the story would flow, and deleted “from the profile certain characteristics of oral speech that a participant would not use in writing—for example, repetitious ‘uhms,’ ‘ahs,’ ‘you knows,’ and other such idiosyncrasies that do not do the participant justice in a written version of what he or she has said” (Seidman, 1998, pp. 103-104). The profiles in this chapter derive from a partnership between researcher and research participant: “It is in the participant’s words, but it is crafted by the interviewer from what the participant has said” (Seidman, 1998, p. 102).

In Chapter 5, I explore the primary and secondary codes that emerged from my grounded theory analysis and identify “connecting threads and patterns among the various categories” (Seidman, 1998, p. 107). First, I portray some of the common characteristics shared by these role models. Then, I explore more about the origins and unfolding journey—how did these role models come to be this way and how do they maintain the path?

## **ROLE MODEL OVERVIEW**

### **Christian Ecological Perspectives**

Participants in my study cover the spectrum of Christianity although no role model self-identified as a conservative fundamentalist. Role models were Evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics. Most were active with a church or religious community; although one attended services less regularly than he used to, and two stopped participating with the

institutional church but still considered themselves Christian and spiritual. All of them had familiarity with, and studied to varying degrees, perspectives beyond the doctrine and dogma of their specific Christian religious roots. As we will explore more in Chapter 5, all of the role models saw their religious/spiritual commitments as inextricably intertwined with their call to ecological enlightenment and sustainable action.

The role models' ecological perspectives encompassed the three broad categories identified by Kearns (1996) as comprising the emerging Christian ecological movement—Christian stewardship, Eco-justice, and Creation Spirituality—and most participants had a sensibility of each perspective. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed overview of these perspectives and the many religious statements on environmental concern and response.

To varying degrees, all of the role models represent the “emerging paradigm” of Christianity (Borg, 2003). Its characteristics are thoroughly defined and contrasted to the older paradigm by leading Protestant theologian Marcus Borg in *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (2003). Table 3 summarizes the qualities of each paradigm.

**Table 3. Emerging and Earlier Christian Paradigms (taken from Borg, 2003)**

<b>Theological Perspectives</b>	<b>Earlier Paradigm (Old Story)</b>	<b>Emerging Paradigm (New Story)</b>
The Bible's origin	A divine product with divine authority	A human response to God
Biblical interpretation	Literal-factual	Historical and metaphorical
The Bible's function	Revelation of doctrine and morals	Metaphorical and sacramental
Christian life emphasis	An afterlife and what to believe or do to be saved	Transformation in this life through relationship with God

Borg (2003) described the emerging paradigm as a movement that

has been developing for over a hundred years and has recently become a major grass-roots movement within mainline denominations. Positively, it is the product of Christianity's encounter with the modern and postmodern world, including science, historical scholarship, religious pluralism, and cultural diversity. Less positively, it is the product of our awareness of how Christianity has contributed to racism, sexism, nationalism, exclusivism, and other harmful ideologies (p. xii).

It offers a more progressive, "open-hearted," perspective that recognizes the importance of sustainability, the practice of compassion and justice, and a broader theological interpretation of "neighbor" (Borg, 2003). A prophetic (Wallis, 2005), emergent (Borg, 2003), and progressive (Fox, 2006; Kearns, 1996) religious perspective calls for social and environmental justice and has the potential (and proven record) of affecting great change. Of importance from the emerging paradigm to this inquiry are the transformational aspects of Christian life in the here and now, versus earlier views of a distant and transcendent God that is to be sought solely in the afterlife. The influence of these views is discussed more in Chapter 5. Not every role model equally adheres to all qualities of the emerging paradigm—Evangelicals, for example, still put primacy in the Bible as divine revelation—but all believe in and have lived the potential for "transformation in this life through relationship with God" (they may also call this presence Spirit, Mystery, Numinous Matrix, Field, or other name) (Borg, 2003). Furthermore, an emergent Christian perspective recognizes the value of "remaking and revisioning" (Wallis, 2008) biblical stories for contemporary times. An excellent example of this is offered in the following updated version of the Good Samaritan parable offered by one of the role models; this parable also illustrates some of the core values of "loving neighbor" that many of the role models identify as underlying their commitment to sustainability:

Basically, [a traveler] is going from Jerusalem to Jericho, a distance of about 17 miles, so friends reminded me that when I was telling the story in Lexington [Kentucky] that is

about the distance I had to travel, and there are no shoulders along the road, so it is a dangerous way to walk. So, he is mugged and left moaning along the side of the road, stripped of everything—his backpack, cell phone, I-Pod, everything is gone. . . . He is left moaning along side the road and along comes the person from his own denomination, his own church, and he just walks on by and that symbolizes people who don't see the problem at all. And then the second person that comes along, walks over to the other side of the road and sees him and says "wow" and is moved with compassion; this is terrible, this man is left half-dead alongside the road, I need to go back to Jerusalem and alert the authorities—we need better patrolling along this road, we need better lighting, I should make a documentary about this to raise awareness. Yet, none of this does the man any good, he is still moaning alongside the road. A third person comes along and he is the Samaritan and this goes back to the time of Joseph, when Joseph's sons were given the great fertile lands in Samaria and there is great animosity between the Samaritans and the Hebrew people. They are not supposed to have anything to do with each other, and yet, the Samaritan gets off the donkey (shows his socio-economic class because he is riding instead of walking) and uses his resources, his wine, his oil, rips up his clothes to make bandages; he is inconvenienced, he can't get to his next appointment on time. He does something dangerous because the road does have muggers. He picks the man up, so uses his strength, and he puts him on his donkey and takes him to the equivalent of a hospital, an inn, and says I will use my resources as well. I will pay for this man's care and I will pay into the future no matter what it costs into the future. I will reimburse you for whatever care is required. And so, Jesus says to the man, "Which of these is the one who shows mercy?" The scholar has to say, "It's the Samaritan." So Jesus says, "Go and do likewise." What Jesus is telling us is that we all need to get off our donkey. We all have to become involved with the problem. He is showing us the continuum of compassion: the first one doesn't see the problem, the second one is moved but doesn't do anything about it (and that is where most of us are; that is where we were, our family), and then the third is the one that actually uses the resources, is inconvenienced, uses his strength, does something that is dangerous or might be ridiculed. I mean, his immediate neighbors, his family, might have made fun of him for what he was doing. "Why would you do that for a Jew?" And that is the position that Jesus is asking us to put ourselves in. So that is the central illustration that we use to show what it means to love your neighbor and what we all need to be doing in this journey (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

### **Many Faces of Sustainability**

Each role model had a unique expression of what it means to live a sustainable life, but all were deeply conscious consumers and very mindful of their impacts on the planet. During our conversations, these interviewees provided numerous examples of how they carefully researched,

thought out, felt into, and otherwise weighed the full life cycle (i.e., “cradle to grave”) implications of consumer purchases and major decisions, including where to live, what to drive, how to heat their homes, food and clothing choices, and beyond. This quote from my interview with role model Sister Gail Worcelo indicates the blend of practical research and intuitive, ethical knowing that contribute to sustainable decision making:

There are two different ways [of decision making] depending on what the thing is. One way is actual research on how the impact, say energy use—on which we did a lot of research for the solar panels and masonry stoves—affects the planet. What would be the best way of heating? It is a big issue in Vermont—huge. So we did a lot of research; on practical things this is the way we go. Other things might require a different, more intuitive, approach. For example, we are in dialogue with an Anglican Community that I’ve been working with over the past six years. One-half of the community is selling their property and they have an eco-center where they live and they are thinking of coming up to Vermont. So, as things have unfolded, Bernadette and I came to separate decisions, that came together, and we said if they are coming to Vermont, why have them buy a whole new property? Why not have them come on our land or at least explore the possibility of that potential? So, right now we are in the process [of discerning]. We wouldn’t be doing research at this point, what we will do at this point with others is to go onto the land, walk the land, and intuitively ask the land—“Is this okay?” We [go] to the different fields or sites on the land in general, and ask “Is this the right thing? Can you hold what this would entail and does it feel right?” So, doing it more from a “Soulcraft” way. Those are two different ways of accessing information.

While this quote is unique to Gail’s situation, similar approaches were used by most of the role models. For day to day purchases, for example, they may rely on practical sensibilities and research about ecological and social implications of their choices. For other decisions, their sense of ethics, compassion, and intuition may come more into play. Usually it is a combination of these two ways of knowing and the head and heart join to guide them to the next step. For all of the role models, the practice of discerning call is a vital part of their spiritual lifestyle (discussed more in Chapter 5). Since they view their ecological and spiritual commitments as intertwined, the act of discerning call extends beyond the conventional notion of listening to God (Farnham et al., 1991) to include listening to the earth and to what is ecologically responsible.

The role models demonstrate integrated paths of knowing in their discernment process.

Thomashow (1995) highlighted the cognitive, intuitive, and affective ways of knowing that comprise ecological identity development; Plotkin (2008) indicated “four windows of knowing” that must be developed for authentic psycho-spiritual development: feeling, imagining, sensing, and thinking. Each role model has developed a strong personal practice of discernment that integrates intuitive, affective, and imaginal knowing with the intellectual resources of study. Most of them live their lives in a posture of discernment and the process of blending all ways of knowing is simply part of who they are. While they did not name this, it is almost as though they internalized and augmented the steps of *Lectio Divina* described in Chapter 3. They encourage all windows of knowing through study, reflection, and contemplation.

Although I did not ask the participants to take an ecological footprint quiz, each would have scored well since most of them endeavor to eat low on the food chain, carefully consider the full life cycle implications of any products they buy and often purchase used goods, adopt buy local principles, and have taken measures to reduce their energy and housing footprints. In short, they are influenced by the Bible’s and Jesus’ anti-consumerist values and have a strong commitment to voluntary simplicity. They engage in most of the actions identified in the religious and other (e.g., *Earth Charter*) letters, directives, policy documents and other calls for environmentally responsible living (see Chapter 2).

After over twenty years supporting watershed preservation and restoration as a professional and personally witnessing how our culture’s relentless consumerism destroyed vast acreage of forest and agricultural land throughout my home watersheds—the Potomac and Shenandoah River Basins—including our family farm, I had developed a fairly clear (and narrow) image of what a sustainability role model should look like. For my research, I combined

my personal and professional knowledge with an extensive literature review to develop ideal sustainability criteria to evaluate these role models. I quickly learned through interviewing my research participants, however, that there are many faces of sustainability. I was too rigid, almost fundamentalist, in my perspectives of what the “way” of sustainability should look like.

The role models profiled in my research expressed their ecological enlightenment and commitment to sustainable action in every facet of their lives, but on the surface it sometimes looked different than what I had envisioned going into this project. While it is true that my first interview was with a fully off-grid couple, other interviews took place in an array of settings. One role model inhabited a 300 square foot trailer that she readily admitted was far from a model of sustainability in how it was constructed, but by virtue of its tiny size she had downsized her material goods and housing footprint to a miniscule amount. Others were green renovating historic homes. And still others occupied ordinary houses, but did so with a strong ecological consciousness to reduce their housing footprints by living with others and/or taking on energy efficiency retrofits, using greener heating options, using nontoxic products, committing to household vegetarianism, and membership in local community supported agriculture. For example, one role model lived in a small, traditional (< 1500 square feet) house on Long Island, but shared it with three other adults, thus reducing their individual housing footprints to well below average. Most role models focused their sustainability efforts on food consumption and production; quite a few of my role models were vegetarians and gardeners. I learned from these visits and interviews that sustainability has many faces, but shares the common thread of commitment, discernment, focus, mindfulness, and creativity. Each interviewee thought carefully about their actions and developed creative approaches to maximizing sustainable choices given the constraints of their living situations.

Each role model also demonstrated sustainability in two other ways. They recognized and honored the “inner” dimension of sustainability as vital to their overall journey. As elaborated on in Chapter 5, in different ways each role model recognized their effectiveness in taking outward sustainability actions depended on how well they were taking care of themselves. They also recognized that sustainability extended beyond their individual spheres and each was an engaged “ecological citizen” (Thomashow, 1995). They gave back, again in different ways and to differing extents depending on life circumstances, but each taught, led groups, and worked to heal earth. Part of inner sustainability explored more in Chapter 5 is forgiveness of self and others. Many cited this as critical for going forward and maintaining effectiveness and enthusiasm in their work and walk.

Each role model would readily admit that they were not perfect and that their journey continued to deepen as they learned more and options for sustainable choices expanded. The commitment to ongoing study and research about sustainable choices was another sustainability practice shared by all role models.

Several commented their footprint scores would be compromised due to transportation. Many of these role models are actively engaged in teaching, speaking, and preaching to others about sustainability which involves travel, sometimes by airplane. This poses an uncomfortable dilemma but most feel their work engaging in environmental ministry is vital and makes the travel palatable. They try to make up for its negative environmental impacts in other aspects of their lives.

The people included in my research are considered role models by others, but are humble in noting their own accomplishments. All of them were gracious when I contacted them to participate in my research and in many ways demonstrated the range of fruits of religious

experience noted by James (1997), Borg (2003), and Keating (2000); these are discussed more fully in the next chapter. All endeavored to live their beliefs so that their outward actions were in alignment with their inner intentions, and all readily admitted where they fell short. Yet all were compassionate with themselves and others, recognizing that the journey is often about getting lost and beginning again. They do not seek attention, but guide through their actions. The characteristics of humbleness and the capacity to “live from the inside out” were demonstrated by all the role models and are illustrated in the following quote from one of them:

I don't really care if people judge me, but if people are going to judge me, I would rather them judge me on my day to day actions, activities, [and] relationships. I was almost taken aback, I was so humbled, when Roy told me he had recommended me to you. I don't think I . . . I certainly didn't lobby him, but what that said to me is that in my day to day activities, without showboating, without participating in rituals or whatever, I demonstrated at least to somebody, the way that I live and how that I live and why I want to live that way, and for me, I think that is so much more important. It's what's on the inside [more] than the outward show (Aiosa, 2008).

This humble way of wanting to demonstrate their faith through actions is something I experienced directly during my interactions with the role models and it reminded me of Jesus' teaching to not advertise your faith on the outside, but instead to “go into your room and shut the door and pray to your [God] who is in secret” (Matthew 6:6) or to “put oil on your head and wash your face” [when fasting] “so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your [God] who is in secret” (Matthew 6:17).

These role models are people others look to or seek for advice about how to live a sustainable life. They have consciously turned from the conventional way, “Old Story,” to a more life sustaining path and are available to show others the way. As you will see from their stories, some were “born in the groove” (DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008), while others had different starting points and more dramatic shifts prompted by life crisis or

some other kind of conversion experience. Despite their status as role models, however, these are ordinary people who, with intention, discipline, support from others, and a measure of Mystery or Grace, are doing extraordinary things. Their works are not beyond our reach. They are true models because they show us what we can do, too. Theologian and spiritual guide Richard Rohr emphasized the process of becoming that the journey toward ecological and spiritual enlightenment and action entails: “the heroes and heroines of faith were not gods; rather, they were human beings walking a journey” (Rohr, 1994, p. 130).

### **Journey Dynamics**

*A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup>Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup>And when the sun rose, it was scorched; and since it had no root, it withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. <sup>8</sup>Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold” (Matthew 13:3-8).*

The profiles presented in this chapter provide a glimpse of each research participant’s journey toward becoming a role model of ecological enlightenment and sustainable living. I focus primarily on the general process of becoming; paying attention to factors that prepared the ground and planted the seeds that would later grow into an ecologically enlightened and sustainable way of life. Like the popular parable Jesus used to describe those coming to a Christian life commitment, these research participants demonstrate three distinct pathways to committed sustainability:

1) Gradual unfolding from a strong foundation; often from the “good soil” of supportive family and community, held up by a “cloud of witnesses” (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008) and mentors, and/or rich childhood connection with nature.

2) Restoration to an earlier ecological consciousness that was lost when the troubles, “cares of the world and the lure of wealth” scorched and choked and otherwise diverted a prior connection and commitment.

3) Complete and sudden conversion from an unsustainable way where no or limited sustainability seeds had taken hold.

Each role model followed a unique path, yet for all of them, somehow and in some way, a sustainability seed was planted and nurtured so that it bore fruit. For some, the journey was smoother than for others. Each struggles in his or her own way to continually align their emerging sustainability ethic within the often contradictory values and framework of community and society. Each acknowledged inconsistencies and temptations as illustrated in this humorous quote by one of the most exemplary role models; she is (normally) a committed vegetarian, but sometimes a situation presents itself such as a visit with a friend at a really good Polish restaurant:

I am Polish and I haven't had a good Polish meal for ages. My parents are no longer alive. My mother made great Polish food, but she is no longer here. So we are at the table and all this stuff comes out. Well, there is this Polish sausage, and my genetic response went roaring to the point of me cutting off a piece and eating it. I haven't had meat for . . . and this of all things. So in a sense [it was] against a principle—I don't even know how that animal was treated—but I fell back into a genetic impulse that was more overwhelmingly strong (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

This is a small example, and all talked about the challenges of making sustainable choices within a cultural system that is aligned against sustainability. However, through their journeys, each role model has come to embody Christian principles of forgiveness, compassion, and reconciliation. When they find themselves off track, they simply return and begin again. They apply this lens outwardly to others and back toward themselves.

The dynamics of spirituality and sustainability hinted at in the Parable of the Sower and demonstrated in each of the role model's stories indicate a process of conversion. Typically

thought of as a sudden and unexpected change of heart, the journey unfolds in different ways for different people:

The born-again experience can be sudden and dramatic. It can involve a dramatic revelation, a life-changing epiphany, as in the case of Saul on the road to Damascus, an experience through which he became Paul. . . . But for the majority of us, being born again is not a single intense experience, but a gradual and incremental process. Dying to an old identity and being born into a new identity, dying to an old way of being and living into a new way of being, is a process that continues through a lifetime. The Christian life as it matures is ever more deeply centered in the Spirit—that is, centered in the Spirit of God as known in Jesus, the Spirit of Christ. For most of us, this takes time. And even for those who can name an hour when they were born again, the process of living into the new life takes time. Of course, progress is not automatic; one can thwart it, obstruct it, impede it. But in the Christian life, aging, if not interfered with, has a way of deepening our centering in the Spirit. The messages and lures of youth and middle age are muted; we can rest more and more in God, more easily be in silence with God. And by being more centered in God, our lives are transformed (Borg, 2003, pp. 117-118).

Borg uses the terminology “born again” with both offerings and qualifications. It speaks of the death and resurrection journey that is central to the Christian (and other faith’s) story of transformation—“dying to an old way of being and being born into a new way of being, dying to an old identity and being born into a new identity” (Borg, 2003, p. 107)—and essential to turning from the predominantly consumerist path to a more ecologically sustainable (and countercultural) one. However, the language has often been misused to imply a rigid set of conservative beliefs.

Eco-depth psychologist Bill Plotkin considers this a journey to a more authentic, or soulful, way of being that eventually leads to *eco*-centric consciousness and action (Plotkin, 2008). Getting there, however, often requires the former conscious self, or ego, to “surrender everything it has come to believe about itself” which is often a challenging passage: “Even when we want to alter our self-concept, it is exceedingly difficult because we must disengage from

something—our very identity—that is the bedrock of everyday functioning” (Plotkin, 2003, p. 316).

If the passage is successfully navigated, Plotkin contends the soulfully mature person understands the “web of life,” has the perspective of “wholeness,” and begins to “[care] for the soul of the more-than-human community.” At even later stages of development, this person takes on a cosmological consciousness and comes to “[tend] the universe” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 61).

Psychologist James Fowler explored similar maturing “stages of faith,” but through a spiritual/religious more than ecological lens (Fowler, 1995).

In its authentic meaning, however, the notion of being “born again” suggests one response for humans at the critical moment crossroads. One way of being brought us to the critical moment. Metaphorically dying to that unsustainable way enables us to step across a threshold, “born into a new way of being” (Borg, 2003). The role models profiled in my study consciously selected the more sustainable way. For some in my research, it was a profound restructuring in identity and way of being. For others, the disengagement, or separation, was from a tangible other, whether partner, friends, community, place, job, or all of the above. For all, this journey has involved some level of separation from the societal norm—our unsustainable system. Even if the person experienced a gradual unfolding of a long-held connection to the earth within the context of supportive family and community, there has been a deepening journey on this counter-cultural path which involves some level of separation from the dominant paradigm.

Regardless of how their journeys started and unfolded, most role models experienced a transformation in consciousness that in many ways models the monomyth described by Joseph Campbell and others as the hero’s journey. The stages of such a journey include a time of

severance, or leaving the old ways; hearing the call and crossing a threshold to follow that call; and returning with gifts to offer others.

Campbell (1973) describes the hero/heroine as one whom:

. . . has died as a modern man; but as eternal man—perfected, unspecific, universal man—he has been reborn. His second solemn task and deed therefore . . . is to return then to us, transfigured, and teach the lesson he has learned of life renewed” (p. 20).

The hero is one “who has found or done something beyond the normal range of achievement and experience. A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself” (Campbell and Moyers, 1991, p. 151). In their pursuit of a sustainable life, and in the ways each role model teaches and/or otherwise reaches out to others, they demonstrate to varying degrees what it means to serve something greater than self. Because of the range of people I interviewed, some provide this service in more noticeable ways than others, but all have transcended the limited boundaries of individual self interest championed in this country.

Oftentimes, the heroine’s consciousness is transformed through “trials” and also through “illuminating revelations” (Campbell and Moyers, 1991, pp. 154-155). Such encounters are considered necessary to prompt the journey of “losing yourself, giving yourself to some higher end, or to another . . . When we quit thinking primarily about ourselves and our own self-preservation, we undergo a truly heroic transformation of consciousness” (pp. 154-155).

Campbell and Moyers (1991) consider the trials as a time for honing intention:

The trials are designed to see to it that the intending hero should be really a hero. Is he really a match for this task? Can he overcome the dangers? Does he have the courage, the knowledge, the capacity, to enable him to serve? (p. 154).

This pattern of trials and the “illuminating revelations” that may come from them also is demonstrated in the stories of these role models. Even those people who said they were “born in the groove” and experienced a gradual unfolding in their journeys toward a sustainable way of

life have had moments of greater awakening and challenges; these are more subtle moments where, poised at a crossroads, they stepped bravely across the threshold onto the “least traveled road.”

Psychologist and rites of passage scholar/guide Louise Mahdi (Mahdi et al., 1996) suggests that “It all begins with awareness” (p. xvi). From there, the journey typically unfolds with “separation, departure, the call to something more.” As Campbell (1973) describes it, “the familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand. . . . Destiny has summoned the hero and transferred her spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of her society to a zone unknown” (pp. 51, 58).

The call to something more leads the journeyer to a threshold. By crossing the threshold, “the secular character remains without; she sheds it, as a snake its slough. Once inside she may be said to have died to time and turned to the World Womb, the World Navel, the Earthly Paradise” where “life-centering, life-renewing acts” occur. These threshold travelers, in his or her own way, cross over and step into the unknown. As you will see in the upcoming biographical profiles, each role model heard the call, and each in his or her own way responded with a threshold journey.

Soon after crossing the threshold, the traveler often encounters what Campbell (1973, p. 97) calls “the road of trials.” There, trials, demons, allies, guides, and gifts often are encountered. Yet its passage is essential for honing the traveler:

After threshold, then the trials: succession of trials. In language of Mystics, this is the purification of the self (the first stage was the awakening of the self). It is when the senses are cleansed and humbled and the energies and interests concentrated upon transcendental things; the process of dissolving, transcending, or transmuting the infantile images of our personal past (p. 101).

Bill Moyers in his extended interview with Joseph Campbell noted that:

All three of the great religions teach that the trials of the hero journey are a significant part of life, that there's no reward without renunciation, without paying the price. . . . And Jesus said in the gospel of Matthew, 'Great is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and few there be who find it' (Campbell and Moyers, 1991, p. 154).

Often, these trials lead to "apotheosis" or a kind of alignment where opposites become one, "the two are the same, each is both, and the dual form. . . is only an effect of illusion, which itself, however, is not different from enlightenment" (Campbell, 1973, p. 170). This condition of reconciliation, alignment, and union between apparent opposites represents a level of spiritual maturity of the "Tao, Supreme Buddha, Bodhisattva, The Word Made Flesh" [Jesus] (Campbell, 1973, p. 171). It is named by psychologist Robert Johnson (1993) as being of the religious realm, a *religare*, or binding "back together again," where inner beliefs and desires are mirrored in outer action. This binding together represents the gift of integrity and wholeness (wholing) that can be returned as gift. It is the place of embodied action, or as one role model noted, "it's been that integration of head, heart, body and embodying that. And so now what is happening is those three coming together and pushing forward into, 'What's the next thing?'" (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008). You will hear stories of such alignment in many of the role model's journeys; it is from this place the hero, or role model, returns. The return is essential to the hero's journey:

The adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the monomyth, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom . . . back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (p. 193).

Like the journey itself, the return often is met with challenges, as well. There are temptations to withdraw and remain sequestered from the day-to-day world, obstacles and

roadblocks are met, and the old mind and way is always lingering at the fringes to tempt the journeyer off his or her new path. The role models' stories reveal the challenges of the threshold journey and the return. Yet the true hero, the true role model, does return. In the stories that follow, the gifts of return are apparent: "The hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become" (Campbell, 1973, p. 243). Each role model, in his or her own way, is sharing with the larger community their wisdom for a new and more sustainable future pathway.

The rest of this chapter presents each role model's biographical sketch following the narrative of the hero/heroine's journey. I start each sketch with a snapshot of how these role models were manifesting the gifts from their journey at the time I spoke with them. Then, I step back in time, addressing questions about the following stages of their journeys: What were the origins of their journey? What was the call that caught their attention? When did they commit to a new road (cross the threshold)? How did their journey unfold? Within these stories you will hear about trials and tribulations, allies and guides, and apotheosis. Unless otherwise noted, quotations in the profiles are from the role model interviews conducted for this research (see Table 1 for interview dates).

Each role model is at a different stage of his or her sustainability journey although all are offering gifts to the world. Through their experiences, they have developed spiritual maturity beyond their peers. A lengthy discussion on models of human development is well beyond the scope of this dissertation, but it is important to note that all of these role models appear to have moved beyond self-interest to a more encompassing perspective (this characteristic is described in more detail in the next chapter).

## **ROLE MODEL PROFILES**

### **Jennifer Aiosa**

Historic Baltimore City is characterized by quaint neighborhoods and many historic, turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century row houses that used to house the worker population. These kinds of neighborhoods represent both the potential and challenge of sustainable living. They are walkable because they are integrated—shops, entertainment, and residential living. Yet, the older housing stock poses a tremendous challenge because the houses often are energy sieves. Nationally, however, there are more than 100 million existing homes, especially in built-up urban areas like Baltimore, Maryland. National climate change and other environmental goals will not be achieved unless the “existing building stock [is] tackled” (Wilson and Wendt, 2007). Green retrofits of this scale are challenging and costly and a relatively emerging concept. This is one area where role model leadership is required.

At the forefront of this vital and creative challenge to retrofit existing housing and model ecologically conscious and sustainable living in Baltimore’s urban environment is Jenn Aiosa. Another urban sustainability pioneer is Rob Schnabel, profiled later in this chapter.

Jenn lives in a 105-year old row house near historic Patterson Park in southeast Baltimore, not far from the popular Inner Harbor. Block after block of row houses were developed in the neighborhoods surrounding the park during the mid-nineteenth century to house the growing blue-collar population that was supporting Baltimore’s expanding waterfront factory, wharf, and rail jobs. After boom times, Baltimore in general and neighborhoods like these in particular, began a significant decline that bottomed out in the late twentieth century. The Patterson Park area began revitalization in the 1990s through shared efforts of long-time homeowners and newcomers. As a relative newcomer, Jenn is an active participant in her local

community's revitalization; this forms a key part of her sustainability ethic. She also is a leader in bringing some ecological consciousness to the efforts.

Jenn is someone who follows the call of the *Chesapeake Futures* report to model “a strong sense of personal environmental stewardship” and “vote with her pocket book” for ecologically sustainable choices (Boesch and Greer, 2003, pp. 1, 156). She models this through conscious decision making for most of her consumer actions even though she is the first to admit she is not perfect. Several people nominated Jenn for my research, primarily because she has a strong vegetarian and local foods ethic. In the course of our conversation I quickly realized that her commitment to sustainability is motivated by her spirituality—driven by an underlying ethic to “do right”—and pervades most of her actions:

I really came to realize at the end of the day my spiritual mantra is about being a good person; being honest, doing what is right (not just for me, not about selfishness). It's about doing what is right in the bigger sense of things: for the future generations, the community. I keep coming back to community which for me is difficult to define—the neighborhood where I live in Baltimore, community of friends, environmental community, people who think similarly or who are interested in similar goals for protected natural resources and things like that. It's about doing good by all those interests. I don't do it because I think at the end of the day or the end of my life I am going to be rewarded by Nirvana or 86 Virgins, or whatever. I don't necessarily do it for that. I just do it because that is what compels me because that is the right thing to do. And, maybe that is a throw back to my religious upbringing because I have that so ingrained in my thought process, you know, doing what is “right” [she asked me to put quotation marks around that]. . . . For me to be right in the world, I have to feel that my actions are right. That I am not harming others. That I am actually doing good for others.

Jenn has a Catholic background but her words echo a Buddhist sensibility of Right or Skillful Action. She relates to the *Chesapeake Futures* report's key recommendation of “Cultivating a New Ethic: The Enlightened Citizen:”

Enlightenment in a certain regard speaks to me because I feel like it's been about educating myself and learning more about making conscious decisions—again in a very thoughtful stepwise process. It's not always about this sort of rigid . . . when I think about conversion, I think about: “I used to be this and now I am this and I am never going to go

back . . .”I think it’s this gray category and I try to be over here more often than I am over there, but every once in awhile I find myself sitting over there saying, “Boy I love these new shoes . . .” I mean, that’s human nature and I am human. One of the things I try most in this world is to try and not beat myself up about being human, which is not always easy to do either. It’s definitely been a journey and that is what speaks to me more than anything.

A stepwise process of reflecting, researching and then acting on major decisions such as where to purchase her home, what kind of car to drive, and how to feed herself demonstrated over and over in our conversation how Jenn models the “enlightened citizen” demanded for a sustainable Chesapeake Bay. It is impossible to capture the full spectrum of Jenn’s actions because they encompass all facets of her life (e.g., even the “small” ones like where and how to buy books). However, in this sketch I offer several examples that demonstrate how an individual living and working in the everyday world can make a difference beyond the narrow perspective of self-interest.

Jenn is a active and outspoken environmental advocate in her role as Senior Scientist with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, so that provides an important venue for staying abreast of issues, enacting her ethics in various policy and other venues, and for getting the word out to the larger community. Our interview did not focus on this aspect of her sustainability commitment, however. Jenn highlighted instead various actions surrounding her home, community, and lifestyle choices when describing her commitment to a sustainable way of life. Community is vital not only to her sustainability, but also provides the basis for her spirituality.

I met Jenn for our interview at Clagett Farm, a working farm in Upper Marlboro, Maryland, owned and operated by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation<sup>xii</sup>, so I did not see her actual living situation. As our interview unfolded, her words began to paint a portrait of model urban

sustainability, a path she consciously chose and a way that is vital for society moving forward since so much of the population and existing housing stock is within urban areas.

Jenn's decision to purchase a historic inner city Baltimore row house provided a way to embody her ethic with visible action. She is steadily updating her home with a range of sustainability actions, one of which cracked open the door for a new way in the City of Baltimore. Jenn's description of her home, her decision-making about it, and her community involvement, demonstrate multifaceted aspects of sustainable living:

- Demonstrating that sustainability also can mean preserving and restoring history and culture:

I live in a wonderful 105 year old house . . . an old row house that is on a great street. It's not without problems, but I love it and I love my community and I love being able to walk places, but I also made that very conscious decision to invest in the city in what I consider to be a sustainable way of living that is not out in suburbia. [She augments her sustainability through other measures such as reducing her housing footprint by having a housemate; choosing to heat rooms only when they are in use rather than heating the entire building; selecting energy efficient lighting; and changing her utility provider to one that supports alternative sources like wind.]

- Demonstrating the importance of "walkability" as a sustainable choice:

I didn't want a house in the suburbs because I didn't want to have to drive for everything. If I am going to drive for work, that is one thing, but I don't want to have to drive for everything else. And Baltimore is the biggest city in the state, it has a lot of history and culture; it is really neat in a lot of ways. I mean, I park my car on a Friday afternoon and I don't get back into it until Monday morning, so I can pretty much walk anywhere I need to go. [Jenn also works at home when she can to reduce her commute to work.]

- Demonstrating the community component of sustainable living

The supermarket is less than a mile away. I have restaurants, I have shops and it's also this fabulous series of communities. And for me, community is very important. You know shop keepers and restaurant owners because you go there so much and you stop in. I got very involved in my local park organization—one of the bigger parks in the city is walking distance from my house. I soon realized it needed help, so I became an active volunteer and was asked to sit on their board and, again, because I feel very strongly about participating in making my community be what I want it to be. [Another aspect of community involvement is how Jenn coordinated with another city friend to purchase a food share from a Community Supported Farm that delivers to the city. Farmland

preservation is a significant challenge and restoration goal in the sprawling Washington-Baltimore area, so supporting local farmers is a significant sustainability statement.]

- Demonstrating how the old and new can blend to create new models for urban retrofitting.

I made a conscious decision to put in solar panels on my house a year and a half ago because I thought that is something I can do to cut down on my energy consumption. It's not gonna solve every problem in the world and it can also be a good example. This is definitely doable in the city and you don't really find that in the city and the fellow who put it in actually used to work at CBF [Chesapeake Bay Foundation] and told me that when he went to the Baltimore City permits department the guy said you are going to have to walk me through this—it is the first one—but it is so easy to do. . . . Again, it's not the end all be all, but it was a choice I could make to put my money toward something that I believe in.

The decision to purchase a house was a “big turning point, a decision point” for Jenn’s sustainability journey. When she finds herself at such a crossroads moment or threshold, she strives to make deliberate, conscious choices in a sustainable direction. Jenn recognizes that through her decisions she has the opportunity to either “make a very conscious decision or sort of do what everybody else is doing.” By making different choices, she “could also influence potentially other peoples’ decision making.”

## **Origins**

In many ways, Jenn’s sustainability seeds were sown early in her life through childhood/adolescent time outdoors and by witnessing the destruction of natural environments surrounding her home. Even though she was raised in “suburban hell,” it “was a neighborhood and we were always outside, riding bikes, playing in ditches.”

Jenn was a self-professed tomboy throughout her youth who “always gravitate[d] toward being outside” and had an interest in the world around her. This led her to pursue science; she “was always very interested in science and wanted to pull things apart.” She began consciously

pursuing her science career in sixth grade. Her parents were supportive of her interests and curiosities and did not try to shift her attention from her tomboyish passions to other, more traditionally feminine pursuits:<sup>xiii</sup>

So I was doing that kind of stuff and I think our parents kind of encouraged that. I remember when I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade I did a science project on plate tectonics. I found it in a book and it was very interesting to me. Again, my dad sort of encouraged it and helped me build this model. What 6<sup>th</sup> grader knows what plate tectonics is? So I was always interested in kind of the world around me and I think that was helpful.

Her childhood home was near the coast, outside of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina—an area prone to severe coastal weather and rapid coastal development. By witnessing human- and nature-wrought destruction, Jenn developed sensitivity to environmental destruction. This combined with her early exposure to coastal regions, ocean waters, salt marshes, and beaches, opened her to the field of marine sciences, which she pursued for an undergraduate degree at the University of South Carolina. The summer before her senior year, “kind of on a complete happenstance,” Jenn’s advisor connected her with an opportunity to do “chemical and physical analyses in the salt marshes.” It was an experience that aligned her interests, passions, and gifts and she “was hooked” on an academic field of study and a career path, but she still had not heard the call of personal sustainability. Her salt marsh research, however, set up the conditions for future graduate study. There, the mirror of awareness increasingly turned inward.

## **The Call**

Jenn’s early love for the outdoors and science discovered a framework for adult expression through two significant events that underscore the importance of teachers and role models. Both encounters occurred during graduate school. One was with a living teacher/role model; the other a book encounter with a historic heroine that influenced Jenn significantly.

In graduate school at the University of Virginia, Jenn continued to pursue her interest in science through a “hard natural sciences Master’s Degree.” She also increasingly knew she was not interested in “just being a laboratory scientist.” The fall semester of her final year she had the opportunity to take a different kind of class—one on sustainability and green design offered by preeminent and visionary architect William McDonough—that dramatically shifted her perspective and began her turn in a different direction:

My fall semester my final year, I ended up taking a class in the architecture school taught by William McDonough and I helped also. It was a very large class, I don’t even remember the name of it, but it was sort of on sustainability, environmental wherewithal, and they needed a bunch of graduate students to facilitate and lead discussion groups. So I did that, I was a graduate student. And I learned so much from that class and from this man as an individual and it kind of put some things in place for me, but it also helped to stimulate that I could use these interests of mine in natural sciences, biological sciences, my concern about the coasts; that this [i.e., sustainability] might be a way to sort of funnel them. I think that was really a big, a good starting point, a turning point for me.

The combination of learning new material and teaching others about it helped Jenn discover a new pathway that integrated her prior knowledge with a new focus and direction. The model of William McDonough in his person and actions, offered a vision of what this new way might look like. Another role model, this one historic, also appeared in Jenn’s life around the same time. Like some other role models in this research, Jenn was significantly influenced by the life and works of Rachel Carson:

A very influential book for me was *Silent Spring*. I credit that with sort of helping me just sift through the whole Bill McDonough sustainability class. But *Silent Spring* was what, I think, helped me make the decision that the advocacy route was something; and advocacy not only professionally, but service to others, advocacy of sort of getting engaged to make a difference, was really influential to me. And this is going to sound really corny, but in undergraduate and in graduate school, I did all of my research in coastal salt marshes and there is a chapter in *Silent Spring* on natural buffers and how we are losing them to development and all sorts of stuff. Because I had just really kind of fallen in love with the coastal salt marshes and all that they represent in terms of our last defense and nature sponges and all of that stuff, and then this book, I actually got the sketch at the beginning of that chapter on natural buffers modified into a tattoo that I put on my

person. It's this very personal thing for me because it represents so much; that one image, this book and how it helped me make this decision about what I wanted to do with my life, but it was also the sketch on the natural buffers and I have such an affinity for the salt marsh.

Given Jenn's unfolding personal and career journey to environmental advocacy and sustainable living, this expression of personal intention, honoring her mentor Rachel Carson, is very powerful and appropriate. I imagine Jenn as providing her own form of buffering and last defense against all kinds of "polluting" and other forces of environmental degradation.

### **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

Jenn noted that her educational path and teachers set her up for her career in environmental advocacy and a deep awareness of environmental and sustainability issues. Her personal journey to pursue a sustainable way of life is "a little bit more difficult to describe" because it kind of unfolded with fewer discrete threshold moments and is closely linked to her education and career journey. She attributes her personal start to living a sustainable life to graduate school: "again, I'll say graduate school was sort of a good jumping off point for me. It was the first time I kind of lived on my own, making choices about where I was living and how I was living and I've sort of continued to do that."

Her work and personal commitment to sustainability are interwoven, each informing the other. For example, it was through her work as an environmental professional/advocate that she had an experience that formed her as a vegetarian:

[It was] the opportunity to go and tour big poultry farms and a poultry processing plant. I got to put the boots, lab coat, and hard hats on and I watched that process from truck to truck; I even got squirted with chicken blood as I went by the razor blade. I remember walking away from that with two overarching "wow" thoughts: 1) holy crap, how efficient this is; literally there are people who stand in line, with one motion, 75 times a minute, pulling out one suite of organs—no wonder they get carpal tunnel, it's crazy

efficient; and (2) oh, my God, the amount of water that is used just in the processing of the chickens—we are not even getting into the growing of the grain—I mean they use water for everything: to keep the surfaces clean, high pressured water to take the feathers off the bird, briny water to bring the temperature down, and a lot of these facilities have their own treatment facilities because they use so much water; it's like a little small town. I thought that's wasteful. It was a tipping point for me because shortly thereafter I decided to become a vegetarian.

At the poultry processing plant, Jenn noticed not only how much water was being wasted, but also how efficient the process was. Her decision to become vegetarian was based on the waste and pollution aspects of meat processing and not the blood. Not only does this quote illustrate how her professional life informs her personal life, but her response to the poultry tour also hints at another quality of Jenn's—her practicality and capacity to see the longer range view (e.g., to live more sustainably, it is necessary to understand the long view and broader life cycle “costs” of any consumer good). Jenn was influenced by practicality more than sentimentality and this suggests much of the way she approaches sustainability—what is practical, what is right and what makes sense given the practical considerations of resource use, cost, and other factors.

On the way to our interview, Jenn began reflecting on the suburban McMansions dotting the landscape around Clagett Farm and shared with me another illustration of her “common sense” approach to sustainability:

For some of it, it is more a common sense test and I think that there is a lot about being sustainable that is [asking] what is it we really need? As I was driving over here today and drove past the brand new big housing development the first thing that came to my head is “why do you need a house that big?” Because then the way my brain works: first thought, “Why do you need a house that big?” And my second thought, “What does it cost you to heat that house?” That's a common sense thing. . . . I am not, I've never been motivated by sort of traditional status symbols. I don't have to have the cool car, the biggest house on the block or the new fad thing. That's not what motivates me. It's pragmatism to a certain extent. Come on, that's just not practical to heat and cool from a financial perspective or an environmental perspective. There is nothing practical about that; it's in the middle of nowhere. I find myself running through things like, “If you live here, where is your supermarket? Where do you go out to dinner?” . . . [T]hat is the way my brain works. So I would like to say it is more thoughtful or proscribed, but it's kind of

not; almost sort of gotten conditioned, or conditioned myself, to think things along that line.

Not only does Jenn demonstrate her common sense approach to sustainability through this quote, but also her spiritual values. She demonstrates the religious quality of “living your life from the inside out, rather than the outside in” that Borg (2003, quoting Buechner, p. 116) and other theologians and psychologists (Fowler, 1995; Plotkin, 2008) suggest is the aim of the spiritual journey. She discerns and follows what is “right” within herself and in relationship with others (including non-human others) as the basis for her choices, not on what looks good on the outside or is otherwise dictated by a consumer society.

Jenn attributes much of her sustainability ethic to frugality (a desire to be financially sound and fiscally sustainable) and conscious decision making that was influenced, in part, by her parent’s divorce when she was in high school. This event was another “defining moment” for her:

I think I became very aware of each of my parent’s decision making, so sort of starting at that point and then in my young adulthood, I was very cognizant of my parent’s decision making and at times almost judgmental about some of their decision making. I think that made me, in turn, very aware of my decision making. I want to be very financially independent. I don’t want to ever have to rely on somebody else, and so you have to make decisions, thoughtful decisions, as a single female who wants to be financially independent irregardless [sic] of whether or not she gets married and has a family; wants to always be able to provide for herself and save for the future and that kind of stuff. So, I think it really stemmed from that and I do pride myself in being sort of fiscally sustainable, as well.

Jenn tries to “be as thoughtful as humanly possible” but like many of the role models, she struggles with maintaining her sustainability ethic when she finds herself “running out the door.” Then it becomes easier to:

pull into Burger King and get an egg sandwich and soda instead of my usual yogurt and granola and I hate it . . . so yeah, I am not always thoughtful at that level.

The other two areas she noted as struggle points for her were around material goods and transportation:

Regards transportation, on the commuter end, I hate it. I work from home when I can. On material goods, I've tried. The good news is I don't like shopping. The bad news is, you can not leave your desk and you can go online. But at least in the last couple of years, I've been focused on quality over quantity. And I also and am very proud to say that I have no problem shopping at Goodwill and some of my girlfriends and I would do an annual [clothing] swap. I have no problem wearing used clothing. One of my favorite stores in Baltimore is a used clothing/vintage clothing store. For me it is about recycling; about this stuff not going to waste. I am wearing a 15 year old coat, and I have no problem with that. I also just went out and bought a new pair of skis. I'm not fabulous on that one, but I try to be thoughtful. It's a tough one. Especially, the busier you get.

Jenn's unfolding sustainability journey is supported by the ethical framework developed in part from her spiritual and religious base. She found it easy to talk about the trajectory of her sustainability journey, but much more difficult to describe her faith journey. She considers herself to be Christian and spiritual, but her current relationship with institutional religion is more challenged and difficult to define; the area of institutional religion has been a struggle:

I took a hard fall maybe in some regards with the whole organized religion thing, but I've always considered myself . . . I believe in God. I consider myself a spiritual person, a thoughtful person. I pray, certainly not daily. I believe that this wonderful God created this globe and everything in it and is largely responsible for the good things that happen in my life. I don't believe in this vengeful God that will spite me if I do something wrong. So, yeah, but again, as I've gotten older and more comfortable . . . because when I first started moving away from the church was this, "you are going to go to hell, and what is hell and it's gonna be horrible and it sort of scares you back into the church door." When I finally got to a place when I was more comfortable with who I was, who I am, and I could be a little more comfortable figuring out church, God, spirituality, all that kind of stuff, I really came to realize at the end of the day my spiritual mantra is about being a good person. . . . I've thought a lot about that, especially since I've talked with you, because my connection or my spirituality is maybe not as evident, but I would like to think that at the end of the day if somebody were judging me, or this whole idea that if I were a role model, that people would see value in what I do or how I do things or how I spend my time—if I volunteer or give money to causes I believe in or try to do the right thing by putting solar panels on my house, or giving change back or donating clothes or whatever—that is the right thing to do. That is not very articulate, I know. But it is really difficult to describe because it is not about tithing or following a religious set of tenets, it is more about this. Whether it is ingrained or this instinctual. For me to be right in the

world, I have to feel that my actions are right. That I am not harming others. That I am actually doing good for others.

The disillusionment in organized religion was triggered by her parent's divorce because inconsistencies between what she was taught by the church and what she knew about her family and the situation caused her to look deeply within to discern what was true for her:

Again, parent's divorce [was a] big sort of turning point in my life, because [in the Catholic church] "holy crap, no one divorced and certainly no one remarried" and so here the two people you love most in your world are sort of turning all this on your head and you're like "what the hell" so I think that was a starting point for me of questioning organized religion. Wait a minute, you guys have been telling me this for 18 years or however many and now suddenly I either have to believe my parents are going to hell and are the two most horrible people in the world or I have to adjust my thinking a little bit. And for me, that was about as much of a journey as this whole sustainability issue. Because that's when, excuse me, when I started to kind of waver back and forth about the whole Catholicism, organized religion. . .

Her questioning reached a head when scandals rocked the Catholic Church: "Several years ago when things happened in the Catholic Church—we harbor pedophiles and we are going to tell you how to vote, I pretty much threw my hands up and said I am done."

This crisis of religious belief helped Jenn forge her own authentic ethical paradigm and felt sense of what is right. By coming to a deeper sense of self from this period of questioning, Jenn matured spiritually and strengthened her later capacity to make independent choices that differed from the sway of peers, family and society; again, "living from the inside out, rather than the outside in." Instead of being a follower among her peers, she became the role model capable of teaching and guiding others.

Plotkin (2003) marks struggles of faith and family breakup as precipitators of the heroic (underworld) journey to the belly of the whale where old and outmoded stories and ways are transformed. Jenn's family and faith trials appear to have helped hone her present sense of ethics. She also is able to trace some of them to her maternal grandmother:

You know, I've always had this sense [that] my maternal grandmother, with whom I was very, very close, helped instill this idea [i.e., right action, not harming others, doing good for others] with me. . . . My maternal grandmother was the most faith-filled person I've ever known in my entire life. I don't really know if she subscribed to a religion; she was very . . . she was a God-fearing woman. She was definitely Christian. She went to church sometimes with my mom . . . I don't think it [i.e., subscribing to a particular religion] really mattered to her. I think it was just about being a good person, being grateful for what you have, and giving back. And everybody has the capacity to do that. She was living on Social Security and my mom's help when she died. She was not wealthy at all. But she always managed to be thoughtful or kind to other people because that was something she had to give in abundance, so it wasn't necessarily about money or monetary goods. She was just an amazing, huge influence on me. Maybe there is a little part of me that feels like if I can reflect any of her in my actions, God what a tribute to her, you know, this amazing, wonderful, amazing woman. And again, her actions just reflected her amazing faith in God, so it is all kind of related and it's in a big stew for me.

Gardner (2002) identified one of the attributes of religion in supporting environmental efforts as the potential to be “strong generators of social capital, an asset in community building” (p. 5). This is an area of loss Jenn feels after leaving the church; its community aspect was important to her and her experience points to the promise and peril of organized religion in supporting the creation of sustainability ethics:

The idea of a community, a spiritual community—we're all a bunch of slobes sitting in church trying to figure out what the right thing is—nobody can tell us with 100% assurance that this is the right thing to think, so we are all just hanging out trying to do better. I really like that aspect of organized religion.

Jenn's experience is not unlike that of another role model, Joyce DiBenedetto-Colton, who, like Jenn, left the Catholic church but still considers herself Christian (and more than Christian) and deeply spiritual. Today Jenn is “not so much about making a show of going to church,” asking instead “Is that the way that you really connect with your God or with nature, or is it more valid in the things that you do that you don't talk about that maybe nobody ever knows that you do?” Jenn demonstrates one of the key attributes of the “religious” person noted

repeatedly in psychologist William James' (1997) classic work on *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: the demonstration of faith is through action.

As she moves forward in her sustainability journey, Jenn is motivated by a core sensibility that is different from most people in the country. Whereas “many people in our culture, our society are motivated by money, material goods, status, status symbols,” Jenn tries her “best NOT to be motivated by those kinds of things.” She does not deprive herself, and has learned how to be comfortable and ecologically aware and sustainable in her actions. She demonstrates a conjunctive understanding of balancing choices to meet “inner” and “outer” sustainability needs:

Again, going back to the transportation thing—I didn't make the choice I'm going to focus on sustainability first and therefore I'm not going to work in Annapolis or I'm not gonna live in Baltimore—I said, look, it's about the suite of choices. It is not about everybody doing everything all the time. It's about the suite of choices. So I drive and maybe that's what helps sustain me in being a vegetarian. It's about tradeoffs. I think a lot of people don't look at it that way. They're like, shit, I am already driving for work so I'm not gonna do these other things, or, I'm not gonna give up my hamburger.

The choice to be sustainable does not have to be an either/or decision. Jenn is realistic and therefore compassionate and forgiving of self and others. She recognizes that the journey is about taking steps that begin to add up over time:

I always try to encourage folks any time I give a talk, that it is about the choices we make and each individual choice we make might seem insignificant, but if everybody in the Universe made that choice, it would be huge. Or, conversely if half of us in the Universe made three choices, it would be huge. I think folks get daunted because they think “I have to be super person” or nothing matters. That's like two ends of a huge spectrum. So I guess in terms of sustaining it, once recycling becomes a no-brainer, then change the light bulbs. It's an additive process. It does become sort of second nature. I don't recall, it might have been a big deal when I stopped eating meat. I don't miss it. I don't feel like I am missing anything. I don't crave it, I don't want it. It is second nature. [A lot of people] think it's an either/or [choice] and it's not. I really think that it's not. I think it's this continuum, this spectrum. It's about putting one foot in front of the other. You don't get to the mountain by jumping to the top; it's a stepwise process and I really believe that.

As Jenn continues step by step on her journey, she continues to carefully consider options, learn about and implement sustainable choices, and more deeply embody her actions until they are “second nature.” In doing so, she widens her sphere of influence, not only through what she does at work and in her community, but simply by who she is.

### **Catholic Priest (C.P.)**

In his book *Sustainability and Spirituality*, John Carroll noted that women religious were at the forefront of the movement toward sustainability within the Catholic Church and focused most of his book on their efforts. However, he acknowledged a small “developing ‘non-organization’ of men who are engaged in ecological spirituality;” they were not discussed in depth because “they are significantly less involved in physical communities on the land, and thus do not offer models of [communal] sustainability” (Carroll, 2004, p. 57). Carroll expressed a hope that this loosely organized group “may sufficiently influence landed communities of men religious who may experience the conversion so much more prevalent among women’s religious communities” (Carroll, 2004, p. 57). C.P. is at the forefront of creating such a model. His efforts within the male Catholic religious communities are exceptional.

After repeatedly hearing about C.P. from several leaders and participants from New England’s Contemplative Outreach/Centering Prayer community (of which I am a member), I finally had the opportunity to meet him during a 2007 Holy Week retreat he co-guided with another of my role models (Sister Margaret Galiardi). This seven-day retreat provided an excellent chance for me to interact with and interview C.P., a man who is an environmental role model and leader for his national community. As I shared time with and witnessed C.P. over the course of the retreat, a quilt of impressions arose, many of which are encapsulated in a Holy

Thursday homily he preached on the outlandishness and outrageousness of Jesus. His words suggest his own journey and personal theology. During the homily, C.P. shared a poem he wrote about the life of Jesus as a role model, suggesting the title “could very well be called ‘Living Outlandishly’”:

All the way from being born in a barn...OUTRAGEOUS!  
... to touching lepers... OUTRAGEOUS!  
... to healing on a Sabbath... OUTRAGEOUS!  
... to forgiving those hurting him... OUTRAGEOUS!  
And Jesus’ life was explicate of what the God of the Universe had been doing for billions of years previous:  
... from creating the Universe out of a seed... OUTRAGEOUS!  
... to the emergence of 100 billion galaxies... OUTRAGEOUS!  
... each with 100 billion stars... OUTRAGEOUS!  
... then creating an Earth with 10 million species... OUTRAGEOUS!  
To us celebrating on this High Holy Day Jesus’ outlandish behavior of washing feet” (OUTLANDISH).  
Why did he do this? He did it to change the perceptions of the disciples.

During the retreat, this Catholic priest repeatedly challenged participants to enlarge our perceptions, consider how our lives might “more plainly point to the sacredness of earth”, and think about what outlandish behavior we model for others. C.P. provided a good example by modeling “outlandish” behavior at different times throughout our seven days together, especially when compared to a more conventional Catholic Holy Week ritual. He was the hearth tender for a Good Friday Sweat Lodge ceremony, preached throughout the week on the parallels between earth’s suffering and the Passion of Christ, wrote poetry, told the story of the Universe by candle light, and spent the better part of a day perched reflectively on a sparse hunting blind in a South Carolina cypress swamp. He tries to emulate Jesus’ outlandish approach to enlarging peoples’ perceptions:

[Jesus] was always trying to enlarge the perceptions of those he was dealing with—the Apostles, the Pharisees, the Sinners. He was forgiving, challenging, teaching; he was always trying to enlarge the perceptions of other people about themselves or their

relationships with other human beings, and their relationship with God. There are a million examples. So, in that sense of enlarging perceptions, I weave that back into Jesus. If he were to be here now, what would he be doing to enlarge peoples' perceptions about the planet and the Universe? And, being sometimes outlandish about that.

This Catholic Priest was personally changed through various events that he considers “stepping stones” on his sustainability journey. They broadened his perceptions and now he tries to do that for others. He is a humble man, slow to take personal credit, but is making substantial contributions at local and national levels. Within his local community, he provides “witness value” by living as a vegetarian in a non-vegetarian environment and choosing as one of his spiritual practices living alone in a hermitage away from the community center so he can “opt out a bit from being totally enmeshed with the local community, the seminary, that’s not into this” [meaning a commitment to ecologically sustainable living]. C.P. lives on the edge of the community, but has not disengaged. Instead, the hermitage is a means of protecting his “inner” sustainability so that he can continually return to offer his gifts. This characteristic of being “master of two worlds” and “[passing] back and forth across the world of division” is one of the characteristics of the hero in return (Campbell, 1973, p. 229). The capacity to live in both worlds enables the sharing and integration of wisdom to create new forms and opportunities; this is precisely what C.P. is doing at his local community through his model of being and in his actions to establish an ecological learning center and community food garden. These efforts are increasingly having an impact beyond the boundaries of home.

C.P. is the first male Catholic religious in the United States to start an Ecological Learning Center and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) garden. Within that context he maintains the teachings and ethical framework of his Catholic tradition through a strong social justice commitment with the CSA to reserve food for lower income people and the local food

banks. He is also the lead for his larger community's national Ecological Initiative (Chairperson of the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Committee) and is helping to craft a land ethic to conserve their extensive land holdings across the country. At many levels, from local to national, this Catholic Priest provides "outlandish" examples of stepping out of the conventional box to enlarge the perceptions of self and others. His work is a sign of hope that Carroll (2004) called for; C.P. is influencing "landed communities of men religious" and they are increasingly experiencing the "conversion" more common in the women's community. C.P. and those supporting him are creating an on-the-ground model of what could be; in his daily actions, C.P. models how to live more sustainably. By opening his work to people beyond his immediate community (e.g., his programs are opened to the public and the CSA reaches out into the neighboring locales), his reach extends to those outside the traditional church walls.

## **Origins**

In reflecting on his journey to a sustainable way of life, C.P. describes it not so much one of a sudden conversion, but as more of a restoration to an earlier earth and farm connection he developed as a child. The seeds of C.P.'s journey were planted in his youth, during long periods on the land. He had two sets of grandparents that still lived on working farms when he was a boy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Every weekend his family would "escape" from the city of San Antonio and head into the Texas hills about an hour away. There, C.P. was:

able to run loose as a boy, a young boy, collecting eggs, riding horseback with my grandpa, bringing in the goats or the sheep, feeding the cattle, milking the cows, all that was like a whole new world from the city, which spoke to me of Earth's fecundity and relationship with creatures—people and animals.

Through these experiences, C.P. developed a connection with farming and also a general love of being outdoors and exploring nature:

When we were on our family's ranch, we had a cabin out there and would spend Saturday nights and wake up early on Sunday morning to go catch some fish and bring those to mom for lunch, so a sense of the Earth providing and me working with that, providing as well for family as a way to contribute. . . . [*a reflective pause*] I would go hunting, but it was not like this ruthless tracking down of animals, it was like sitting up in a tree, in a hunting blind, where you would sit for hours on end and lots of times not seeing any deer, but seeing other things like squirrels and birds or hearing acorns falling . . . just that oneness with the natural world at an early age, I think, taught me some lessons that I might not otherwise, or that other people might not, get.

His religious call was formed around the same time, especially during some international travel and mission work he participated in during high school:

Something that was really formational important for me and my religious call was my Senior year of high school when I was chosen as one of five students to go down to our Mexican missions. The Oblates are in the Mexican State of Oaxaca working with Indigenous peoples there, so every year the high school seminary would send five guys and a priest for two-months. I was chosen my Senior year to go, so to travel as a 17-year old middle class Anglo male American into this whole other world, three-hours by van to Laredo, 26 hours by train to Mexico City, a God-awful overnight bus ride to the Pacific Coast to the town of Salina Cruz, a six-hour jeep ride to the mountains and a 10-hour mule ride from there, to where there was no electricity or running water to these villages where they speak Spanish. So, I was really a long ways from home in many respects. What I saw there was—people were so happy even though they didn't have anything, except they had their faith, and community, and they were very close to the natural world, and so that was very formational for me because I was coming from a very different worldview where I was told in so many ways that the key to happiness is to have "things." And these people didn't have anything, yet they were infinitely more happy than I'll ever be. I think that was really important to me. I don't know if I could put it all into words at that time—I was only 17—but I had the sense well maybe I can be an Oblate priest and I can be a missionary and I can work with these people, not to bring Christ to them, because Christ was already there.

C.P.'s experience of his grandparents' farms and his opportunity to see an earth-based culture living simply on the land led him to pursue his joint passions academically. For C.P., his environmental call was inextricably tied with his religious call; they were "calls within calls." He

felt his direct experience with another world culture and worldview at a “very young age, a tender age” opened him up to an ecological worldview.

However, when he began his academic studies and later vocation as a Catholic Priest, he felt the discomfort of disconnection. First, he got an undergraduate degree in Environmental Studies and later a degree in Theological Studies that led to his eventual ordination as a Catholic Priest in 1990. When we talked about his journey toward an ecologically enlightened and sustainable way of life, the first thing C.P. shared was his disappointment that his training in environmental studies and theological studies “were not informing each other” whereas in his lived experience, he knew deep down they were connected:

The divine was not mentioned when I was studying the science of environment in college and earth was not mentioned later when I was studying theology. So, I had a deep love for both—theology and environmental studies—but they didn’t seem to be informing each other.

## **The Call**

After his ordination, C.P. followed the conventional path of becoming a Parish Priest, but always felt like something was missing. He had a sense that there was more to his calling, but as a busy young priest did not actively pursue the inner tug toward something more. However, he began reading the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) and learning about ecotheology and ecospirituality. He discovered that some people, mostly the women religious, were “bringing together those two worlds.” In particular, one place called Genesis Farm in Blairstown, New Jersey, established in 1980, “always seemed to come across in [his] reading, as well as [in] talking to other religious.” C.P. was intrigued about this earth studies learning center founded by Dominican religious sisters because it seemed to bring together his two loves. It seemed like it

might provide an answer to his deeper call and he wanted to go there from the moment he found out about it; seven years later (in 1997) he was finally able to attend one of their earth literacy programs.

The year before his program at Genesis Farm, C.P. had the opportunity to participate in a Cosmic Walk ritual<sup>xiv</sup>. This ritual experience of “walking” through the unfolding Universe Story was originally developed by Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, co-founder of Genesis Farm, but is now used by earth literacy programs around the country. C.P. counts experiencing the cosmic walk as another significant stepping stone on his overall sustainability journey:

There was something extremely powerful about entering that timeline that tells the sacred story about billions of years of creation [and when] you get to the end, which is today, [there is a mirror you look into, so] you are actually seeing yourself as part of the story. And so, when I saw myself as a part of that larger story for the first time in 1996 it just inserted me into a larger perspective and worldview. Just like it tripped when I went to Mexico when I was 17, [the Cosmic Walk] so broadened my perceptions and once you know you can't go back like you don't know, or that you've never experienced that—at least that's been the case for me. I can just keep on going forward.

A third stepping stone, or sense of deeper call, came for C.P. during his time as a Parish Priest, in the form of a positive projection he had on a local environmental activist. Through her actions as a community activist responding to an environmental threat, she provided another model for how he could carry his passions into the world:

There was an environmental activist in one of the towns who was protesting a large plastics company—the largest plastics company in the world was across the bay from us on the Texas coast. She was protesting and really putting herself out there and I admired her and I guess that challenged me to not fall into a sense of satisfaction with Parish ministry as it was. It was very generalized. As a parish priest my sense was that one becomes very generalized doing many things but the ecological question wasn't one that was supported or seemed like it could be nourished in that situation. So then, like I said earlier, hearing other religious, primarily women religious, talk about Miriam MacGillis and reading a bit about that in NCR [*National Catholic Reporter*], that's where I got turned on.

## Threshold and Unfolding Journey

After a long wait, in 1997, C.P. was finally able to attend one of Genesis Farm's two-week earth literacy programs; he was hooked. He commented that experience

just gave me a whole new perception of myself, of earth, of the universe, and of the call within a call, an ecologic call within a religious call. [That experience] kind of set the stage then for me of how I might be doing ministry in the future. So, I brought all that to Miriam MacGillis on the last day of the two-week program and she invited me to come back for a two-year internship. That was just total gift to really go back in 1998-1999, for those two years of internship—one year in the ecological learning center and one year in the community supported garden. To immerse myself that deeply and for that length of time really sharpened and broadened that new perception—it went down in my bones.

This experience in the “womb of Genesis Farm” continued to deepen C.P.'s sense of call and idea of what was possible, all the way “down in [his] bones.” His participation in the programs at Genesis Farm brought together his loves (environment and religion) with expanded knowledge/awareness (mind) of how “our governments, institutions, and corporations are not acting in accordance with the knowledge of the integrity of Earth, resulting in the abuse of humans, the annihilation of other species, and the poisoning of the life-support systems of the planet” (C.P., n.d.). In classic threshold fashion, he emerged from Genesis Farm with new perceptions and a vision of how he would like to do ministry in the future.

C.P. considers his time at Genesis Farm, coupled with the skillful mentoring of its founder Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, to be the critical moment of his sustainability journey. Before his time at Genesis Farm C.P. says “I was somewhat superficial in what I was committing myself to” whereas afterwards “I was convinced that I can't not be about this.” While at Genesis Farm, C.P. “came to know that's what I would like to do—create a model like Genesis Farm in the Midwest, in Godfrey, Illinois,” at his local community.

The seeds for a center like Genesis Farm were planted during his formational two-year internship there. He considers Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis a strong mentor:

Huge. She really mirrored me as such a student of Thomas Berry and a teacher for so many, being a pioneer, starting an ecological center back in 1980. I mean, way, way early—it was the same year I graduated from high school. Really working so deeply with the insights of the new cosmology there with her programs, being able to walk the talk. And her own dedication to living sustainably.

He began writing a proposal for an ecological learning center and CSA for his own community while at Genesis Farm and began the challenging task of convincing his larger community of the importance of such a project immediately upon his return. It was not an easy sell at first, but C.P. eventually prevailed and considers his success to be a combination of personal will/stubbornness, Grace, and the support of others:

I've never seen myself as an organizer or a director of anything; I had never been a pastor or a director of a retreat center, so to come into this role without that experience, and be able to pull off what has happened with our ecological initiative—you could call that Grace. Or, you could call it stubbornness, or focus, or whatever you want to, but I guess all those things work together. But Grace would be part of that—the language of the Universe providing.

It took two years and a lot of hard work, frustration, and unexpected circumstances to get the proposal through. His journey of having to “explain this to my community and draw up a proposal” brought the concepts “down to even a more internal level where I had to own it and talk about it with others.” This effort to embody his ethics with on-the-ground action helped C.P. deepen in his own commitment to a sustainable way of life; his commitment was honed through challenge and persistence as evidenced in the following account from our interview:

We started writing the proposal while I was still at Genesis Farm and then in November 2000, all the Oblates from across the country got together at kind of a colloquium, congress . . . Leading up to this gathering in Albuquerque, New Mexico there was a process to discern new ministries, so it was a prime time for me, for us, to bring this concept of an ecological ministry before the whole community. [It was initially voted down . . .] So for the whole next year, November 2000 to November 2001, it was like

banging my head against the wall thinking this might not happen. [C.P. worked very hard the following year to continue working on and promoting the] ecological proposal and looking at the science and the ecological times of air pollution, water deterioration, global warming, and we put all of that in the proposal. [The timing of this proposal, the second time around, after the events of 9-11] was probably a big one [in getting it passed]. I did go personally to meet with the Council a couple of times and we even gave them a day of retreat on Cosmology. It was based on an earlier Oblate document written in 1997 from Rome called “Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation.” So, according to our own Oblate documents [and] the Oblate Bishop from San Angelo, Texas [who was] regularly writing Pastoral Letters about how we need to care for the environment—we were really just making obvious the signs of the times. So, I think all of that in that year, sowed the seed for them to give us the approval.

C.P. was at Genesis Farm in 1998 and 1999. When I interviewed him in 2008, it was the 10-year anniversary of his internship, which he still marks it as a major turning point that opened doors and led him in directions previously unimagined. As he described his experiences there, making a point to note his anniversary, it was very clear how important the place and his mentor Miriam MacGillis were and still are.

In 10 years, C.P. has come a long way in living his vision. After receiving permission from his community to move forward with the Oblate Ecological Initiative in December 2001, C.P. has been coordinating with others to develop ecological learning programs, seasonal ceremonies, and the community supported garden. The two key components of the Initiative are the La Vista Ecological Learning Center and the Community Supported Garden at La Vista; both trace their roots back to the seeds within C.P. that were planted at Genesis Farm. The Ecological Learning Center offered its first earth literacy program in 2002. In 2003, the garden produced its first sharable crop of food, a large portion of which was reserved for lower income households and the local food pantry; today over 200 shareholders are members of the garden and many more enjoy the free or low cost contributions of garden produce. C.P. also is in demand to give

programs and lead retreats around the country. All of this from a man who never saw himself as an organizer or director:

Yeah, it's fun to see how that's all come about, and like Miriam MacGillis would say, you put the request out there and that the Universe helps it to happen. So, I moved to a place that I was only in for a year when I was in Seminary back in 1984 and moved to that place in 2000, not knowing anybody; there's hardly any community supported agriculture in that area, so putting the idea out there. . . Miriam does say that if you provide people with something more beautiful than what they already have, they will naturally go in that direction, so I really saw that happen.

C.P. looks to Jesus as a model of one who “was always trying to enlarge the perceptions of other people about themselves or their relationships with other human beings, and their relationship with God.” And so, C.P. lives his life in response to his own questions from his Holy Thursday homily:

- What outlandish behavior do you model for others?
- How might your life more plainly point to the sacredness of Earth?
- Can we bodily enter into comprehensive compassion?
- Can we so humble ourselves as to serve that which is perceived as beneath us?

In his actions at the 2008 Holy Week retreat and far beyond, C.P. models an ecologically enlightened response to these questions. Genesis Farm provided the “womb” enabling C.P.’s sustainability journey to grow. He readily acknowledges help from a host of human others, from his community members, from an informal support group of “Earthy Oblates”, and from the volunteers and participants of the ecological learning center and community supported garden. Ultimately, he is guided by the role model of Jesus and the question “[If Jesus were here now,] what would he be doing to enlarge peoples’ perceptions about the planet and the Universe?” Like his role model, C.P. sometimes is “outlandish” on his quest and is making an impact in doing so.

## **Calvin Dewitt**

Cal Dewitt is a man who has accomplished much by “following his love,” living “joyfully” and with “a response of gratitude to God for all of these wonderful blessings.” He exuded this attitude throughout our interview and I was able to witness it in person at a national conference last year. Cal genuinely seems guided by and infused with the “gifts of the spirit”<sup>xv</sup>.

Cal is a prolific writer on the Biblical and Christian call to “creation care” and has contributed to several national policy statements about religion and the environment; most recently he is in a leadership role with the Evangelical Campaign to Combat Global Warming and Climate Change. Many of his works informed my growing understanding of the religious, especially Christian, basis for sustainability and I was hopeful he could participate in my research at some capacity. I never expected this highly popular teacher, speaker, “preacher,” organization founder, and policy maker to have time for an interview, but I hoped he could provide recommendations on people to interview. I “cold called” him via email and was astonished when he agreed to talk with me. I share this story to illuminate Cal’s graciousness and provide just a hint his broad reach and the wide, encompassing lens of his heart. Not only did he spend an unprecedented amount of time talking with me, but he has touched countless students in his career. His life is about reaching out, making contacts, building bridges and spear-heading immensely influential initiatives. His reach is wide and stretches from his local community in a small Wisconsin town all the way to the international sphere in his efforts to support creation care.

When I asked Cal, “What most motivates your desire to live sustainably?” he replied with a paraphrase of the definition of religion “written by Wayne C. Booth, the late professor of English literature at the University of Chicago: The passion to live right and to spread right

living.” In a paper and talk for ASA, Cal drew on an expanded version of Booth’s definition<sup>xvi</sup> to explicate a “triad framework” for the “interactive engagement of scientia, ethics, and praxis” for “shaping and reshaping human behavior in the direction of right living and restoring right living on earth:”

Remarkable here [i.e., in Booth’s definition] is the presence of the three corners of our triad, each of them complementary to the other two: the *way things are* (scientia), the desire *to live right* (ethics), and *to spread right living* (praxis). Therefore, *within* religion—as Booth defines it—we find the need both for scientia *and* ethics, each complementing the other, enabling us to understand and perform right action, *praxis*, in the world (DeWitt, 2007, p. 122).

Cal writes not only academically and theoretically about these topics, but his knowledge of science and the ethical desire to live “right” according to religious wisdom support Cal’s extensive praxis in the world. This Ph.D. Zoologist is recognized as a national expert on the desert iguana. As we will see later in this profile, this scientific knowledge, coupled with his religious ethical paradigm, broadened his practice from pure science research to the integrative approach he has today. Central to religious wisdom are the virtues of “humility, charity, and veracity” (Smith as cited in DeWitt, 2007). In his interactions with me, and witnessed by his reach across the spectrum of academic and non-academic disciplines, and extending to all of the creatures and creation (see Dewitt, 2000), Cal is clearly someone that embodies these virtues and walks the talk of his faith.

## Origins

*“I have been in love with the Creator since my childhood and have been inspired and awed by God’s creation for over fifty years” (DeWitt, 1995, p. 7).*

Cal considers his sustainability journey as “a kind of unfolding, but it is also kind of being born in the groove. It was there from the very start.” The role of faith in Cal’s journey is

explored more in Chapter 5, but he learned and experienced early on a “two-book theology” where God is revealed in the Word of scripture and the world of nature. When I asked him if he had ever had a numinous encounter in nature he responded with:

I think that’s the way I felt at three already. I don’t know when it happened but I was born and raised in the city of Grand Rapids. Our lot was 40 feet wide. There would be no reason for me to have... well, you know, this is the greatest wonder... on the other hand, the red centipedes under boards behind the garage and pill bugs and germinating horse chestnut seeds was all the fascination I needed to get started.

He further attributes this start to a supportive family and community (a “cloud of witnesses”) that encouraged his early love of nature. He recalls his entire community offering a “web of mutual support”:

As I was building cages in my backyard zoo and looking for screen and wood and so, friends of my father would get me scraps and bits of lumber that they had salvaged from their carpentry work—they were housing contractors or house builders. Everyone supported everybody. They really . . . I got a lot of support from lots and lots of people that went way beyond my family. The support was encouragement and wonder about what I was doing now, about my birds and reptiles and mammals and so that I was keeping. It was really very fun.

From these community role models he learned early on to “follow love, follow joy...”

I was tremendously encouraged in this whole Reformed Christian worldview to pursue whatever I loved to do. My dad told me, “Do what you love to do and then you will do it very well and eventually someone will pay you for it.” And the thing I loved the most was to work with animals and plants and I just followed that.

In one of his books, Cal elaborated on his father’s guidance; it is important to share because it speaks to the significance of parents encouraging child’s innate interests instead of constraining and forming them. This parental openness to encourage childhood inclinations is a characteristic alluded to by many of my role models, but articulated clearly by Cal in the following vignette:

One Sunday evening when I was in my teens, I overheard my uncle ask my dad a question about me: “Shouldn’t you help Cal do something more important than this—

something that will help him get a job?” My dad guided him down the basement stairs to see my birds and fish while my mom and aunt prepared after-church coffee and goodies. Then my dad responded to my uncle’s question, softly replying that he thought I was doing just fine. You see, my dad had told me earlier to keep doing what I loved to do; that eventually someone would even pay me for it. In this—his rendition of Matthew 6:33—he was ever so right! I now get paid for what I love to do. My profession is caring for God’s creation and helping others to do so too (DeWitt, 1994, p. 7).

This early love of animals and plants eventually led to advanced degrees in Biology and Zoology and an over forty-year successful and influential teaching career that expands far beyond the walls of his University of Wisconsin classroom to the “intersection of environmental science, evangelical ethics, and practical activism” (Roberts, 2006).

The original sense of wonder and passion that got him started remains strong today. Despite his immense workload and popularity, he granted me an extensive (three hour interview) and regaled me with delicious stories about his home wetland, his local conservation efforts, and all the ways he still pursues his passion as a “boy scientist:”

I go into great depths to study my place. Right now I am studying the sea that was located here prior to there being any green plants on earth and I am working out the shape of the sea bottom which is about 400-500 feet beneath me, and am trying to reconstruct the animal life of the sea bottom and then how that relates to deposits of muds and silts and how that’s shaping the formation of shale and sandstone and how that is shaping the supply of water to the surface through the springs and fens. I’m doing that for fun. That’s what I do. When I do that, I think of myself as a boy scientist—no big grant, no big research team. I have a little lab in the basement and I have this great wetland in the backyard. I can think deeply, I can pursue this. And I pursue it with the idea of coherence, right? I want to somehow make this inland sea, which was only 100-200 feet deep; I want to somehow make this cohere with the wetland I know. It’s really fun.

Cal’s childhood was instrumental to his unfolding sustainability journey. His passions were encouraged: he was able to keep a backyard zoo; he had the freedom to explore his physical place on foot and by bicycle and to explore his intellectual passions at the Grand Rapids public museum. There, he taught himself herpetology and other subjects. His Christian Reformed Church religious tradition also formed him in developing conservation ethics (Cal took great

pride in sharing that John Muir and Teddy Roosevelt were also of his tradition) and honing him as a scholar.

As Chapter 5 will illuminate in greater detail, Cal's ultimate teacher and role model is Jesus:

Like the great Teacher—my model—I too like to teach on field trips! And, I am also a continuous student, learning from the “university of creation” and from God’s holy Word (DeWitt, 1994, p. 7).

Cal's love of “Creator” and God's creation eventually led him to the deserts of the southwestern U.S. There, he began to hear a deeper call to sustainability and environmental action.

## **The Call**

In graduate school, Cal had the opportunity to study the desert iguana. This opened him up to a deeper awareness of the role of human greed in environmental destruction. He witnessed first-hand “avarice published on the landscape” when his study site was destroyed through commercial and housing development. This honed his sustainability ethic and sparked what would become a strategic approach to “publishing your passion on the landscape and in other people's lives:”

The study site I was using was out on the open desert and as I was concluding my study what came onsite near me was a big truck that watered the surface of the desert and they were preparing to lay a concrete slab on the watered area and build a house for what was eventually going to become the city of Palm Desert, California. And in time, it did become Palm Desert, California, and my study site is now an approach pad for a drive-in bank. I went back there many years later and no one knew about these lizards although there was one in the zoo. But no one there knew anything about what I was talking about and this had been its habitat.... [This] was the first time I had experienced the exercise of greed on a grand scale. That really did bother me because I didn't think people could really be that way. There was, for example, some distance from where we were—maybe 18 or 20 miles—an area where some developers had arranged to level some sand dunes, making them flat, then watering them and putting concrete slabs on and building very expensive homes that were featured in *Life* magazine. I went out there after these things

had been there a couple of months and the wind had whipped the sand out from under one of these big homes and the home had cracked in the middle and half of it was hanging into the hole and it was then that I realized that greed/avarice can drive people to do things that are really pretty evil, pretty deceptive, and misrepresentative.

Cal names this moment in his book *Earthwise: A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues* (1994) as the time when he “first became powerfully aware of the way human beings were abusing creation. It was then I learned about the foolishness of our species” (DeWitt, 1994, p. 27).

### **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

Discovering that “the home of the hundred or so big white lizards that I studied was covered with a drive-in bank, and that was surrounded by a city,” transformed Cal. His youthful “[oblivion] to human abuse of creation” (DeWitt, 1994, p. 27) was tempered by this egregious example of human greed and folly. Cal wrote that he was “no longer . . . ignorant about what people are doing in and to God’s creation” (DeWitt, 1994, p. 28). He began to develop, instead, a strategic mind that would inform his journey’s future trajectory:

One of the things I learned from that is when you see avarice published on the landscape it is best to see it in places through which you are traveling but before it really has hit your landscape and then what happens is that you look out your landscape and think, “ah ha” and it’s going to come here, too. Let’s play chess. And what you do is you move as many moves ahead as you can and you say, “ah ha”—this person across the marsh or this family, they own this property and they don’t know that this could become a shopping center or a great development or that their farm could be destroyed or would be destroyed once they pass it on, so you start talking with them. That is one of the things I did here in the Town of Dunn is I thought many, many moves ahead . . . talked with all of my neighbors . . . and where I am right now is in the middle of a 1000 acre reserve. And, that has resulted just from my talking with my immediate neighbors. What happens here is that . . . it hardly even looks like activism, it looks like pacifism. All you are doing is “loving your neighbor as you love your self” and you are trying to publish that love on the landscape, with accord with what they really want to see in life.

Cal's sustainability actions are an extension of this love. He supports environmental action from the local to international level and at home demonstrates his sustainability through frugal living and in fostering a natural landscape and creating a wetlands preserve. He lives by the tenets he writes about and teaches/preaches to others. Table 4 provides some examples.

**Table 4. Examples of Calvin DeWitt's Creation Care Principles and Guidelines**

<b>Principles for Creation's Care and Keeping (DeWitt, 1994, pp. 39-46; DeWitt, 2008, pp. I-28-I-34)</b>	<b>Distillates from a Christian Cultural Matrix of Story, Song, and Exposition [About Creation and Creature Care] (DeWitt, 2000, pp. 306-310)</b>
1) The Earthkeeping Principle: As the Lord keeps and sustains us, so must we keep and sustain our Lord's creation.	1) Authorship and Integrity of the Cosmos: There is but a single just and loving Author of all that is.
2) The Discipleship Principle: We must be disciples of Jesus Christ, the Creator, Sustainer, and Reconciler of all things.	2) The Creation and All the Creatures Belong to Their Creator.
3) The Sabbath Principle: We must provide for creation's Sabbath rests.	3) Intrinsic Worth of the Creatures: The divine authorship of all things means that creation and all its constituents have intrinsic worth apart from their utility or perceived pleasantness, and thus the whole creation and every creature must be respected.
4) The Fruitfulness Principle: We should enjoy, but must not destroy, creation's fruitfulness.	4) Human Beings as Part of Creation: We human beings do not stand apart from 'environment' but are part of the whole.
5) The Kingdom Priority Principle: We must seek first the kingdom of God.	5) Human Beings as Imagers of God
6) The Contentment Principle: We must seek true contentment.	6) Penalty for Eschewing Our Reflection of God's Love
7) The Praxis Principle: We must practice what we believe.	7) Creation is a Powerful Teacher.
8) The Conservation Principle: We must return creation's service to us with service of our own.	8) Mindless Selection Should be Constrained in Mindful Society.
	9) Contentment Rather Than Maximization is

<b>Principles for Creation's Care and Keeping</b> (DeWitt, 1994, pp. 39-46; DeWitt, 2008, pp. I-28-I-34)	<b>Distillates from a Christian Cultural Matrix of Story, Song, and Exposition [About Creation and Creature Care]</b> (DeWitt, 2000, pp. 306-310)
	a Worthy Goal.
	10) Truth Must Always Be Sought.
	11) The Whole Creation Praises Its Creator.
	12) Humankind Must Recognize the Human Predicament and May Commune in Dialogue with the Creator.

His Seventh Principle for creation care (i.e., “We must practice what we believe.”) is especially important when considering moving from theory to practice among Christian role models. Cal evoked several biblical passages to illustrate that

Christian environmental stewardship does not end with the last chapter of a book we are reading on the subject. It does not end when we pick up a study book on a different topic. Instead, studying the Bible to learn God's requirements for stewardship of creation marks a beginning point. It brings us directly to the life-and-death question, “Now what must we *do*?” (DeWitt, 1994, p. 46).

When providing examples of his sustainability practices he described “a beautiful trunk on which I have my terrarium with all of my carnivorous plants. That trunk, we rescued from the junk that was going to go to the landfill and I cleaned it all up and re-painted it very, very beautifully. That's the way the house works. We have almost no dollar flow through furniture.” His natural and biodiversified lawn was featured in a seed packet called “Cal DeWitt's lawn.” This lawn “has 70 different species of plants.” He uses “no fertilizers or herbicides on our lawn” and he “transplant[s] things into it to give it even greater diversity.” Cal also keeps a “Hibernacula in the lawn for garter snakes and ground snakes which over winter beneath our lawn—they number between 40 and 50. The lawn also contains a garden as Cal and his wife grow many of their vegetables; they also are members of the CSA and shop at a Co-op. Further

still, the lawn is part of an even larger wetland preserve that Cal stewards. It helps them to “protect the breeding Sandhill Cranes” and “70 species of breeding birds” live in the marsh. In his local surroundings Cal demonstrates an ongoing commitment to the “boy scientist” inside and visibly models how to implement a community-based environmental ethic.

His lens is wider than his personal home, however, and Cal was active in getting his local town of Dunn involved in environmental stewardship. In fact, Cal suggests that one of the most important sustainability measures any of us can undertake is to be involved in local government: “Land use plans and land use policy and the way we use land is governed at the local level and we have control over that and we have to remove the lie that says that is not where it happens. And that will empower us. We have to rediscover the power of the populace and this is at the local level.” He’s played many roles in his hometown:

I’ve been the Chairman of the town and the Supervisor, too. Three people run the town and I’ve served that way and led the whole community through the stewardship plan. And then, our community as a whole has done some interesting things. We have an automotive oil recycling place where you can bring in the oil you drain from your car. We have intensive rotational grazing on one of our farms that also does seasonal dairying and they produce their own cheese from grass-fed cattle and they are probably out there grazing even today. We have two CSA farms, one next door.

Cal’s “community” extends beyond the Town of Dunn to the international influence he wields as a leading environmental evangelical. This reach was briefly described in Chapter 3.

In all he does, Cal finds religion “as strong as ever and as important as ever.” In Chapter 5 we hear more about how this man seeks to live his life “as a prayer” guided by a principle of coherence—“Everything has to be coherent. Everything has to make sense with respect to everything else.”

Whether discussing his religion and spirituality or his sustainability actions, Cal describes his journey in the following way:

I do have targets that I have set, but what I am expecting is that by pursuing the path, toward integrity of the landscape, society, of community, of whatever, you are open to new doors, to branches of the path, that otherwise you never would have seen. They may be even more fruitful than what you thought the path you were on would be. In other words, the direction is always the same, but as Robert Frost wrote in a Road Not Taken: “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood and I took the one less traveled by.” . . . Sometimes I say, “Okay, that is the direction I have to head, and in that path.” You are continually putting yourself in a situation where you will make new discoveries. And those new discoveries will sometimes be branches off that path that you never would have seen if you hadn’t taken it. And those branches may well be the new path in the same direction but that will bring you much closer to achieving your goals. The important thing is to know that you are on the path that will lead toward justice, toward integrity, toward joy.

Although my interview with Cal provided just a snapshot in time, I remain continually inspired by his passion and compassion for self and others, as well as by his humility. Through his studies and activism with all kinds of people, Cal more than most people understands the extent of environmental degradation and the immense challenges in overcoming it. From my own time in the trenches of working on myriad environmental issues, I marvel at Cal’s joyful presence and it is a reminder for me to remain “ever in awe,” to practice “joyful gratitude,” to “set [myself] up for discovery,” and to respond with love. Cal’s role modeling helps us to “lighten the load we carry and give[s] us a great deal of (joyful) redeeming things to do.” He does “not pile on the guilt” but inspires us by reminding us that:

God knows we, and all members of the human race, are guilty—always have been! ‘For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23). But ours is not to grovel in polluted gutters, nor is it to wring our hands over our sins. Instead, our purpose is to go about reclaiming creation for our Lord; for, as Psalm 24:1 tells us, ‘The earth is the Lord’s . . . .’ When we work to reclaim God’s creation, we do so in joyful gratitude for God’s great gift of salvation. (DeWitt, 1994, p. 8).

It feels impossible to do justice to Cal’s vital vocation in this profile but I will conclude by suggesting he is a person of deep commitment, energy, optimism, joy, gratitude, faith and follows his own advice to the question, “What must we do about creation?”

“Love God as Redeemer *and* Creator, acknowledge God’s love for the world, and act upon this by following Jesus—the One who creates, upholds, and reconciles all things.” We can present this action in the three simple terms that follow: 1) Awareness (seeing, identifying, naming, locating); 2) Appreciation (tolerating, respecting, valuing, esteeming, cherishing); 3) Stewardship (using, restoring, serving, keeping, entrusting) (DeWitt, 1994, p. 78).

Cal uses his scientific training and teaching to foster awareness; in the way he reflects on and writes about his home marsh (Waubesa Marsh) and continues to study it, he demonstrates deep appreciation; and in all his actions from steps to con-serve<sup>xvii</sup> native grasses in his lawn to wider actions that bridge faith traditions and academic disciplines in negotiating climate change policy statements, Cal lives the call to stewardship.

### **Joyce Dibenedetto-Colton**

At the end of our interview, Joyce shared with me a handout she wrote for one of the sustainability classes she teaches. Entitled “Lightening Your Ecological Footprint: Greening Every Room of Your Home,” Joyce’s article is filled with practical advice on voluntary simplicity and ways to make the home place more ecologically sound. It concludes with the simple phrase, “First, live it” (DiBenedetto-Colton, 1995), words that appear to summarize Joyce’s approach to life, where “practice” whether sustainable or spiritual, transforms from a discipline (something she does) to an embodied expression of who she is. For example, Joyce shared that she “practice[d] sitting meditation and contemplation as well as sat sang” for years, but “now recognize[s] and practice[s] living meditation” (J. DiBenedetto-Colton, personal communication, November 15, 2007).

Even though I did not have the chance to meet Joyce in person, her approach to my questions and the thoughtful nature of her responses speak to her lived meditation and her

mindful approach. She is a reflective and deliberate person, conscious with her choices and actions and aware of her place on and impact to the earth. She's moving toward a long-held dream of off-grid living in a one-room log cabin with her husband. In the interim she has turned their suburban Miami house into an organic gardening demonstration center. Joyce models sustainability in this very unlikely place and illustrates with her actions that sustainable choices can be made in all places and ways.

I used to visit a friend who lived in Miami's suburbs. When flying to south Florida, I was always struck by the reflection from backyard swimming pools, a shimmering reminder of some of the unsustainable choices that are sucking the Floridan aquifer system dry. Hearing Joyce's description of how she turned her suburban yard into a productive organic food system and her pool into a natural pond is tangible evidence of how counter-cultural this role model is. When we were talking, I imagined peering from an airplane with binoculars to see rows of vegetables and a pond with native wetland plants amidst a sea of perfectly manicured "ChemLawns" and aqua-blue swimming pools. She and her husband (Joyce is clearly the "green" lead) live an organic vegan lifestyle and diet where "50 percent" of the food is homegrown. They have a typical suburban south Florida house, but inhabit it in a very atypical way:

Cement block structure home—single family dwelling, [zoned] suburban/agriculture but we are fortunate to have 1.25 acres. We have a well. [There is a] long screen patio the length of the house to let the outdoors in and to enable breezes; swimming pool but converted to a natural plant pond with little waterfall; vegetable garden and fruit trees (our growing season has become a month later because of global warming... starting in November and November through May); solar water heating and a few solar lights.

One of Joyce's primary sustainability focuses is food systems and she counts one of her most significant sustainability actions as being a resource for others. She gives "demonstrations and workshops in organic gardening and vegetarian nutrition" and met her husband when she

was teaching a natural foods class. The essence of her sustainability practice is summarized in her response to a question I asked about how she would recommend others to embark on a sustainable life:

What you do in your life is the most important thing. [Practice] mindfulness in every room of your home... audit each room of your home [and do] three things no matter how small in each room. It is the way you **eat**. Stuff you have to do every day... Eating habits make an enormous impact. The whole production—it's an enormous system. Hook into your local resources: CSA, Co-op, vegetarian group. Find that community where you are that is focusing on sustainable food production, healthy eating and hook into those. [Or, start one...] I helped establish an earth care group here in Miami [chapter of EarthSave International]; it was a community resource. But, lead by example. Remind people that their practice will be observed by others so anything they do will be a model for others.

## Origins

Joyce considers sustainability not so much about a “journey towards” or a “commitment to” because it was a given, a way of life. She was born into a family with a strong ethic of voluntary simplicity and from a young age had a frugal, earth connected and sustainable way of life modeled. She learned a different kind of currency that was based more on the natural environment with wealth related to the abundance from the natural world:

We were taught to appreciate life in a simple but rich way. Primarily, my childhood experiences spent in the marine environment of off-shore South Florida (places where there was no evidence of other humans) had a very significant influence on my perspectives of how to live. Of course, my parents were responsible for providing these experiences, and were the greatest [models] for living a life of voluntary simplicity. So when you ask about a “journey towards,” or “a commitment to,” these don't resonate because this was a given, a way of life. We lived—in comparison to others—a modest life. However, we recognized it as very wealthy because we valued things like the ocean and the beauty of the natural world and we were surrounded by it—actually immersed in it. My father's value of wealth was of a different currency.

Also, Joyce was able to interact imaginatively with nature often as a child. After the family moved to Florida when Joyce was a young child, her father became a boat builder. This

opened the door to nature adventure and exploration: “We’d get on a boat, go to an island offshore where no one was around; he’d collect stuff to make a lean-to, mom would make fire; it was like we were Indians. We did this all the time. I recall learning things from the natural world.” She wrote in an email response to one of my questions:

We were never at a loss for boats and spent most weekends skin diving around off-shore islands—often camping overnight. Being immersed in the warm clear waters of the Atlantic Ocean in the 1950’s caused me to bond—body, mind, and spirit—with the natural environment. Earth became my teacher and remains so today—although I expect I was a much better student at age ten than I am now.

Joyce also traces her sustainability roots to her paternal grandparents. They, including her father, immigrated to the United States from eastern Italy and a farming culture closely connected to the land. She recalled the bulk of her childhood summers spent with her father’s large family on Long Island where she “worked with my grandmother and aunts in the ‘summer kitchen’—and all of us (cousins too) worked in their large garden to cultivate and harvest bushels of vegetables to be stored for the winter months. Again, it was a simple yet rich life with much synchronicity, functionality, love, and enjoyment.”

These rich experiences of interacting with food production, having a family culture of voluntary simplicity modeled, and exploring nature with all of her senses combined to create fertile ground for Joyce’s sustainability seeds to be planted early in her life. In high school she recalled “sitting in class . . . making a sketch of where I would like to live and what type of dwelling I would want to build.”

## **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

It took a mentor in MacGregor Smith, colleague at Miami Dade Community College and founder of the Earth Ethics Institute, to help Joyce see the gifts of her perspective and to open doors for her to express them. She considers “Mac” the

greatest catalyst in my adult life and in my vocation. I always knew that I lived differently from other folks (or at least viewed consumption differently)—even as a child, I could see differences in my friend’s households. However it was Mac that provided “affirmation” and credibility to living more sustainably and he also provided career opportunities within which I could actually define and recognize that I was living a more sustainable lifestyle (than the average American) and so through these programs that he created, I could “fit” into a vocation that could accommodate my life values. We created a number of programs together at the college.

Some of these programs were the Environmental Demonstration Center that “provided models of appropriate technology and organic gardening” and the Earth Literacy Communion that “brought in the cosmological and spiritual/moral aspects that are foundational to a paradigm of sustainability.” Mac was instrumental because he recognized Joyce’s uniqueness and provided a platform for her to bring her voice into the world. Working with Mac in teaching and developing sustainability and earth literacy programs helped Joyce fully realize her ethic.

Much in the same way Joyce’s family modeled sustainable lifestyles and provided abundant opportunities to interact with nature, her childhood experiences also supported her spiritual development. Joyce recalls “having a sensibility of spirit from a very early age:”

My parents did not squelch that. In fact they provided experiences that nurtured and reinforced my connection with the natural world. They showed me the wonders of diversity. While my father was ever awed by nature, my mother managed with few or no words to convey the spirit within all things. From an early age I found myself exploring thoughts about the cosmos and the origins of the universe. So this self-exploration has always been with me. . . . My father said he didn’t need to go to church to be with God. My mother loved attending churches and synagogues to experience the diverse approaches that each church or religion practiced to celebrate the sacred. She allowed me to see the purpose of religion. Not as exclusive, but rather as inclusive. And above all, introspective.

As a child Joyce was baptized three times in three different Christian churches (Methodist, Baptist, and Catholic) but now describes her spirituality in a more universal way, saying she is Christian but not just Christian because she resonates with many different religions. Most importantly, Joyce's sense of spirituality encompasses an immanent God and "recognize[s] the sacred in all things." Her early connection with nature forged an embodied knowledge of "the spirit infused in all."

The institution of religion has "remained throughout [Joyce's] life an academic or theoretical subject used to explore diverse perspectives on the spiritual experience." As such, she finds "it to be ironically distracting from direct experience of divine spirit." Religion did help to shape her ethics, which include "an avoidance of waste or hoarding: a recognition of gluttony or stealing from future generations." Joyce commented that "spirituality/religion creates the ethic and that is what gets integrated:"

Religion framed an ethic and spirituality exists before that. Religion gives you some kind of theoretical framework for it. But religion did shape my ethics, my morality. Once I was in touch with Spirit, it kind of infused everything and that comes through in everything that you do. It needs to be grounded, integrated, and become really part of who you are. In the Eastern traditions/religions [there is the] concept of karma (she sees as cosmic cause and effect). This is the way the Universe functions... It has become integrated. You recognize Spirit and you respect that and then you function in a more ethical way and you are not alone in this world anymore. What I am doing for me I am doing for others and vice versa. I do my best to do no harm.

Joyce sees her efforts to "share my understanding of Earth with others" as "part of [her] continued journey in realizing spirit" and considers earth literacy a vital part of a person's spiritual and sustainability journey:

Earth holds the story of the universe. Actually, we all do. Yet I see that many are kept illiterate – many rendered blind by social and cultural constructs perpetuating an image of the world in which spirit is "supernatural." Ironically, religions have also served to offer constructs in which spirit can be isolated; and we are admonished from seeing God in all things. . . . The more we learn to know Earth, in its anthropomorphically-unaltered,

natural state, the greater our opportunity to resonate with and recognize the nature of spirit. We then have the opportunity to recognize the spirit infused in all, and we can begin developing a deeper understanding of how to live, how to be. When we are able to consistently recognize the sacred in all, then we are likely to respond mindfully.

### **Margaret Galiardi**

After over thirty-years of engaging in social justice and peace work, Margaret was transformed through an extended wilderness experience of prayer and fasting into a new phase of her vocation that changed the trajectory of her work from a *human*-centric focus to a more encompassing *cosmo*-centric view. Now, Margaret describes herself as:

someone who is trying to practice theology. By that, I mean, being involved in actively implementing a worldview that is consistent with a kind of single sacred community of life worldview.

Threads of Margaret's current view existed in her earlier work. She summarized these earlier "ministries" as including "teaching grade school, working in parishes, and coordinating programs for homeless persons" (Galiardi, 2008, p. v). A big piece of Margaret's work was working days for the Intercommunity Center for Justice and Peace in Manhattan "while residing in a convent that was also a shelter for women, who were homeless, battered, or released from prison, and their children" (Galiardi, 2008, p. v). She also lived for awhile with "undocumented persons at the Oscar Romero Inn" (Galiardi, 2008, p. v), served as "Homelessness Prevention Coordinator with the [Long Island] Inter-faith Nutrition Network," became Director of Ministry for her congregation, and was asked by Rome to "accept the position of North American Co-Promoter of Justice for the [worldwide] Dominican Order" (Galiardi, 2004, pp. 13, 15). These last two vocations began in 1995, also the time our country was deeply enmeshed in the Iraqi conflict. Through her involvement as Co-Promoter, Margaret faced innumerable issues, but the

suffering of her Iraqi “sisters and brothers” kept rising to the surface until she was moved to act. Margaret stated, “Simply writing to Congress wouldn’t do. *With our very flesh*<sup>xviii</sup> we had to say something” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 17). With another Dominican sister she initiated a series of U.S. Dominican delegations to Iraq, an act of civil disobedience that was to offer “Voices for Veritas” to a suffering people.

In the trajectory of her religious vocation, Margaret’s lens was widening from her initial embrace of immediate family and religious community, to homeless and otherwise marginalized people (especially women), to her “brothers and sisters” in Iraq. All this time, Margaret clearly followed her Catholic and Dominican mission of “[promoting] the dignity of marginalized persons [and rejecting] violence in ourselves and in society in order that all Generations will grow and cherish life” (Dominican Congregation of the Holy Cross, 2009). Her lens was already broadened to encompass those outside of her immediate view. With each experience she deepened in her discernment, focusing on two primary questions: “Where will our culture find the impetus for the deep transformation that is needed? What involvements will foster the radical change of values that will jump-start the re-shaping of society?” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 14).

These questions led her to a substantial and wide-ranging reflective reading practice of “liberation theologies: Latin American, Mujerista, American Black, Womanist, and Feminist from different continents . . . Ecological and Eco-feminist theology . . . the work of Passionist ‘geologist’ Thomas Berry [that led to] Brian Swimme’s writings and on to the lectures of Caldwell Dominican Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 14). Still, during most of her vocation Margaret’s attention and “works” were focused on social justice for humans.

This perspective shifted dramatically during her 54<sup>th</sup> year in 2001, when she ventured to the Death Valley wilderness to undertake her first vision quest, a multi-day sacred ceremony that

culminated in a three day solo and water-only fast. She had reached a crossroads in her career and in the manner of Jesus she turned to the wilderness for deep discernment; “I am going to the desert to fast and pray to find out what is required of me at this point in my journey” (Galiardi 2004, p. 26). What she discovered was an invitation to an even broader and more encompassing worldview that is described in more detail later in Margaret’s biographical sketch. The experience she had on her vision quest shifted her understanding of “the one thing, or the central thing, that if addressed [would] cause a conversion in every area.” Before, she felt “that the response to that question was around how we treat our fellow human beings.” The awakening that happened to her on the vision quest helped her

realize that there is yet another level under that. It’s about how we treat everything, really. And you know, as Thomas Berry would say, that “The Universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.” And I think once you get that, it just shifts. It’s certainly not that I am saying I don’t care about how people are treated. [I am not saying] I don’t care about the poor, I don’t care about the war. I do, but I see now those things as an expression of a worldview which says that other people and other things are just objects for my use and not subjects. So, I guess I see justice now as all inclusive. Thomas Berry says in one of his essays, it’s about this whole awareness as being able to experience the presence of the numinous in the natural world and working for justice for the whole earth community; and so that is really what I feel. It has opened up to a working for justice for the whole earth community.

Today, Margaret lives out this shift in perspective in all aspects of her life. She is striving to be more ecologically aware and sustainable with her personal actions and she seeks whenever she can to influence her community toward a similar course. She describes her focus as the “inner consciousness of humans and the role it plays in generating global imbalance” (Galiardi, 2008, p. v). This “centers her work on an Earth-based eco-spirituality” (Galiardi, 2008, p. v). After being so profoundly affected by her own vision quest, Margaret now guides others on vision quests. She also has developed a wide range of programs that incorporate elements from her Catholic tradition with new perspectives. She “offers lectures, retreats, and workshops

nationally on such topics as ‘The New Cosmology,’ ‘Re-telling the Christian Story in Light of the Larger Universe Story,’ ‘Earth, Spirit and You: A Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’” (Galiardi, 2008, p. v). She recently developed a new program on “God and Darwin.”

Margaret’s influence reaches adult men and women religious and laity around the country. For the 2008 academic year she worked with a college on Long Island to extend her reach to a younger audience. Margaret also shares her new appreciation for a more encompassing eco-justice through consulting with the Center for Earth Jurisprudence whose mission “is the re-envisioning of law and governance from an Earth-centered perspective” (Galiardi, 2008, p. v). Margaret has partially documented her unfolding journey in two books that I also consulted for my research:

- *Encountering Mystery in the Wilderness: One Woman’s Vision Quest*, Galiardi (2004)
- *Where the Pure Water Flows: The New Story of the Universe and Christian Faith*, Galiardi (2008).

I first met Margaret in 2007 when we were both participants in an eco-spirituality program called, “Conversations with the Sacred Other,” offered through the Animas Valley Institute in the Finger Lakes region of New York. After that, I had the opportunity to visit her at her home in Long Island when conducting the interview and then later during a 2007 retreat she was leading in South Carolina. The retreat, entitled “A Sacred Journey: Celebrate Easter with Earth,” allowed me the opportunity to experience Margaret’s approach to integrating eco-spirituality with Christianity. She was facilitating with another research participant (a Catholic Priest, “C.P.”) and part of the experience is shared in his biographical sketch. The week-long retreat coincided with Holy Week and artfully integrated traditional liturgies with an ecological focus. Participants learned cosmological principles and participated in a “Cosmic Walk” ritual,

spent time crafting mandalas, experienced a guided “earth mindfulness meditation,” explored how the archetypes of the Easter journey (e.g., exodus/liberation and death/resurrection) were mirrored in the environmental crisis, and spent a day of solitude and fasting on the retreat center land (a mini-vision quest). This retreat was transformational for me in the ways it wove together ecological identity work, basic environmental studies, cosmic consciousness, earth-based spiritual practices, and the work of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme with traditional Christian Lenten-Easter services. It dramatically shifted my perspectives and opened my heart to Christianity in a new way.

## **Origins**

Margaret’s vision quest awakening was in many ways a coming home for her, a restoration to an earlier connection to nature she had as a child, but lost in her later years. In her book *Encountering Mystery in the Wilderness: One Woman’s Vision Quest*, Margaret recalled how her mother took her for daily walks along the water when they lived in Brooklyn: “It was, I am sure, those daily excursions along the shore that are responsible for my love of the water and all things expansive.” This connection was deepened when the family moved to Queens when she was six years old. Margaret was constantly outside playing in the open fields (lots), interacting with nature (like catching polliwogs in ponds) and in the evenings would sit on the stoop with family and look for the first star (Galiardi, 2004, pp. 1-2).

But these suburbs of New York City would not stay wild for long and Margaret attributes her disconnection from the natural world in part to a rapidly developed landscape: “These early experiences soon faded into the background of my life as the streets were paved and homes were built on every available parcel of land. My paradise in the natural world had disappeared

(Galiardi, 2004, p. 2).” The grief of that early severance is still present with Margaret and I could pick up the lingering emotion in our conversations and in her writing:

To destroy it [natural world] is to destroy that which is both incomparable beauty and our life-line to the Divine. Those daily walks along the water, of which I have no conscious memory, my childhood experiences playing in the lots of Queens, of chasing rabbits, catching polliwogs, and wading through patches of reeds, were rites of initiation into wonder and the meaning of the wild. Sitting on the front stoop of our family home every evening waiting for the appearance of the first star, and frequent visits with my friends to the ocean as an adolescent were the means by which the natural world awakened in me what I would now call an interior spaciousness, in which I began to be sensitive to imitations of the Divine (Galiardi, 2004, p. 83).

Margaret has come to viscerally experience the natural world/earth in the ways eco-feminist theologians Mary Evelyn Tucker (2003) and Sally McFague (1993) describe it: as the “numinous matrix of mystery” and “the body of God.” She says, “[these expressions] point us toward the earth rather than away. And, I think it’s going deeply into the earth that gives us the experiences of the Divine.” Because Margaret knows the pain of losing that connection, she works tirelessly to maintain it in herself and to foster it for others.

Margaret entered the convent after high school in 1964 and began a time of her life that enlarged her worldview in terms of human-focused social justice, but further disconnected her from the natural world. She had a dream after her vision quest that helped her understand the origins of her disconnect from earth:

Sustained reflection on the dream and two extended periods of living outdoors made me aware of how much of my education, religious formation, and socialization as a woman had severed my connectedness with Earth. I began to see my initial dis-ease in the natural world, my awkwardness with Earth-based spiritual practices and my lack of confidence in my ability to take care of myself out of doors, as symptoms of a real amnesia wherein I lost the memory of my origin in the Earth-Mother, as well as my connectedness with “all my relations” in the natural world (Galiardi, 2004, p. 68).

As summarized earlier, much of Margaret’s religious vocation as a Dominican was devoted to justice and peace issues. Unbeknownst to her at the time, this path was setting up the

conditions for a later conversion to a broader definition of community and more expanded view of justice. Some of the struggles, road blocks, and decision points Margaret experienced early seem to have opened her to greater empathic connection with others. For example, she engaged in parish ministry until “the clerical system rose up to greet me” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 8). This experience with the “hierarchical, male-dominated clerical system” helped her make connections between her experiences and “the world-wide oppression of women, people of color, low-income persons, and the peoples and nations of the South” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 8). This led her “outward” to a more expansive ministry that embraced “Catholic social teaching on the systemic level.” During this time she worked during the day to “change the systems that were (and still are) the cause of poverty and oppression in our world,” and in the evening lived in a convent that also served as a shelter for homeless and battered women and their children (Galiardi 2004 pp 10-11).

Her view continued to enlarge, from the parish level to a broader community level and then to the international level when she was asked to be the North American Co-Promoter of Justice for the Dominican Order. This was an extremely busy time for Margaret since she also was involved in a leadership position with her congregation. She “began taking very long walks, oftentimes in the pre-dawn light” to help her sort through everything, especially the challenges she could not share with others. In some ways, these long walks, usually in a natural setting such as the coast or forest parks of Long Island, began the process of restoring her heart’s connection with the earth and cosmos that was fully revealed during her vision quest. These walks, plus the extensive reading she was doing on eco-feminist theology and earth literacy (especially Swimme and Berry’s *Universe Story* and other works by Thomas Berry), were preparing the ground for the seeds of her new ministry. She speaks of these sacred walks as a

time when, “Earth, in all her numinosity, was becoming a living companion. . . . Earth was supporting me. I did not yet realize, however, that Earth was also beckoning me” (Galiardi, 2004, pp. 16, 20).

## **The Call**

After thirty years of ministry and leadership with her community, Margaret was asked to consider the position of Prioress. This was a significant decision point for her, one that Margaret describes in the following way:

I was fifty-four years old. If I were to be elected Prioress, I would be sixty when I completed the term. There was nothing specific that was calling me in another direction, other than an instinctual sense that this was not the way to go. No doubt I was standing with Robert Frost at that very spot where, ‘Two roads diverged in a yellow wood.’ I knew that ‘way would lead on to way,’ and that choosing one, ‘I doubted if I should ever come back’” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 24).

In talking over the options with a friend, she was encouraged to try a vision quest. It was the right suggestion at the right time and Margaret immediately started looking for opportunities to join a vision quest program; it was mid-December 2001 and she needed to let her community know about the Prioress position by the end of January 2002. Time was of the essence, but “way led to way” and Margaret found a New Year’s vision quest program in Death Valley (December 29-January 6). The opportunity was available and Margaret felt “sheer terror.” Even though she was “accustomed” to “instinctual fear in the face of a challenge,” this was different. She wondered:

Can I do this? Should I do this? Why *would* I put myself through such an ordeal? Clearly this was very different from a ‘standard retreat’ (Galiardi, 2004, p. 26).

Her “attraction to the vision quest experience was greater than [her] fear of it” (p. 26), so with a “flurry of activity”, she left for the journey.

## **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

Margaret entered the quest from a place of fullness. She was not in crisis. Things were working for her. But, she was “at a pivotal point in [her] journey.” She used the solitude and extended time of fasting to discern her next steps. She also was moved by the plea of St. Augustine, “For thy mercies’ sake, O Lord my God, tell me what Thou art to me” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 27) and this question provided focus for her time in the desert. God revealed as “Surround Silence, Terrifying Immensity, Illuminator of the Four Directions, The Sun on Whom You Wait, The Summer in Our Winter, The Life of ‘Mountain,’ Brightest Star of the Desert Night Sky, The One Who Stretches Me Beyond My Fears, The Face of the Rock, Hidden Energy, The One Who Brings Life from a Stone, The One Who Sniffs Out Who We Are, My Dream Teacher, The Changing Colors of the Mountains, The Stark Mountain Peak, The Gently Sloping Hill, Holy Wilderness;” all qualities immanent to and transcending the natural world that was her vision quest home (Galiardi, 2004, p. 54).

Perhaps the greatest surprise and teacher for Margaret was a persistent kit fox that visited her each night of her three-day solo. This being offered her a gift she attributes as the crucial turning point in her sustainability journey: “The gift I was offered by the kit fox was an invitation to expand my consciousness to include the rest of the sacred community of life...It was a call to conversion” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 55). The vision quest was a tipping point for Margaret “because it brought everything together. I had been reading and been studying for years and then this just brought everything together, the intellectual with the affected, it just brought everything together.”

Although earth was beckoning Margaret earlier, she did not turn fully in her commitment to eco-spirituality and sustainable living until the vision quest. The vision quest experience

helped her identify within herself a “deeply buried alienation from the natural world” and helped her “re-member” her connection and opened her to the “inclusion of the larger community of life as companions and carriers of revelation” (Galiardi, 2004, pp. 33-34).

Margaret came to realize

*(without faulting or blaming anyone)* that the actual physical development of the neighborhood in which I lived, coupled with my ongoing education in the faith and growth as a young woman, had a profound effect upon my relationship with the natural world. These experiences began to eclipse my sense of intimacy with nature, making it ever more difficult for me, not withstanding my life-long love for the outdoors, to be sensitive to the revelation of the divine in the natural world. I simply stopped looking for it there. . . . The Vision Quest shocked me into remembering that I need the natural world to perceive Holy Mystery. Indeed, without it, there is not spiritual life. . . . My vision quest experience affected a kind of ‘soul retrieval’ in me—a real re-membering of the self—that changed everything. . . . I needed to pursue a more fundamental justice—a justice that seems to be foundational to every effort to create right relationships . . . we are an expression of the life of the planet. This, in turn, awakens the knowing that we are in relationship with everything and everyone that exists (Galiardi, 2004, pp.84-85).

The vision quest made clear to Margaret that she would not pursue the Prioress position because she “knew [she] had to pursue what [she] experienced in the desert but [she] had no idea how that would ever happen.” Since her time in Death Valley, however, Margaret is a woman on fire with passion to live into her restored connection with the “numinous matrix” and is compelled with urgency to “practice theology” in a new way that supports her deeper “earth consciousness” and share it with others. She also is determined to never lose her connection again. Margaret had a significant dream after her first quest that firmed her commitment:

I want this part of my soul back. I said to myself, “and I will fight to get it back.” And I would add to that now: “and I will fight to keep it; to keep what has been returned to me.” I just turned 61 and I’ve been blessed in my life with good health (mental and physical). I’ve had my moments like everybody else, but I’ve never felt better, never been happier; this is what this Story, what this transformation has offered to me. I am so grateful for this gift.

The profound conversion Margaret experienced on her quest was like an internalized “Great Turning” where she

could almost feel it in my body trying to make this turn. I felt this after the quest. You know, you try and do it from every angle. I mean you try to think differently, act differently, pray differently, understand differently; I mean it’s a huge shift. It’s a huge shift.

Like others I interviewed for my research, Margaret sought to put her conversion into action. Her book about the vision quest (Galiardi, 2004) articulates some of these steps. Sometimes the return journey, when the quester seeks to incorporate and enact the gifts of her vision quest in day-to-day life, is more challenging than the quest itself. Margaret encountered some road blocks, but her resolve in keeping the vision alive and moving forward illustrates her commitment to live her transformed consciousness into the everyday world amidst the challenges.

Some people questioned why Margaret was “abandoning the poor” since she had such a long and distinguished vocation supporting social justice. But her focus shifted to a more encompassing justice of working for the earth. Margaret admitted it is a “constant challenge” to stay focused: “the focus is the earth.” The gift of Margaret’s vision quest was understanding in her mind, heart, and body that “to be human is to be a mode of the earth [referencing a quote of Brian Swimme]” and resolving to “make choices that whatever I do needs to be focused toward that.” Margaret does not “want to do something that is going to have [her] spinning out in 18 directions. It needs to be focused toward earth and that is a daily challenge.”

Margaret’s first efforts to implement her emerging work in the world met with success and set backs. When I was listening to her share her story, I had an image of a woman leading a group of people on a journey through new lands comprised of some familiar terrain, some

existing trails, and entirely new landscape features that needed exploration. For the most part, the journey unfolded without mishap, but every once in awhile, the trail petered out or the new areas became too tangled to navigate so the travelers had to turn back and start in a new direction.

Margaret's story of how she came to be where she is today illustrates some of the road blocks and redirections journeyers returning from the threshold often encounter and underscores her resolve to maintain focus and bring her new vocation into the world. Initially Margaret started a little center called

“Openings” and it was a place for healing the earth-human relationship . . . It was local in Amityville [Long Island]. As I was working on that project, the community asked me if I would take that and move it, the work, out to Watermill [a retreat facility the Congregation had on the coast of Long Island). That is how I got to Watermill. The interesting part of this . . . When they asked me to do that, I said, “Well, I just have one thing that I want to ask you back before I give you an answer; [it is] a request. I am asking you not to have me close down what I started, move out to Watermill, and then a year later tell me you are going to sell the place.” They said that is not under discussion, but as the way things go, that is exactly what happened.

With the support of others, in her year and a half at Watermill, Margaret was able to develop and offer a variety of programs that explored “spirituality through the lens of the new cosmology.”

They also

brought together the scientists, a theologian, and Carolyn McDade (poet, song-writer) and we did a series of programs about this and in a short period of time, we were building a national reputation as a place where we tried to probe, to do spirituality through the lens of the New Cosmology and to try to integrate the Christian story into the larger Universe Story.

Like many religious orders, Margaret's congregation was struggling financially and it became too costly to keep their Watermill property open, so it was sold to private owners. As one of her last acts of earth-spirituality at Watermill, however, Margaret successfully negotiated an extensive waterfront conservation easement to provide a 350 foot buffer to the water's edge.

Since the Watermill Spirituality Center closed, Margaret has continued to do this work in a variety of venues. She moved back to the Amityville area and closer to the Motherhouse of her congregation where she now supports an ecological learning center and community supported garden they have there. However, her reach is far broader. She described her current work as:

Well, it's been kind of a picking my way, one step after another throughout my life, trying to stay focused on this work and I would say specifically fostering the awareness of or the transformed awareness of what it means to be human, the livingness of the planet, and expanded understanding or comprehension or sense of the Divine. So you just pick through and then you find out ways that your work and your life give expression to that. . . . I continued doing the work of spirituality through the lens of the New Cosmology through a wide variety of speaking engagements. And, I have spoken really all over the country on various topics around the New Cosmology and Thomas Berry. I've created learning programs and retreats. I've given Vision Quests locally to try and help people fall in love with Long Island, fall in love with this state . . . so I have continued the work.

In many ways, Margaret's perspective and work bridge two worlds. In this way she shares a trait that characterizes role models and threshold journeyers—"freedom to pass back and forth across the world division" (Campbell, 1973, p. 229). Margaret has found over the course of her evolving work that

unless someone is able to speak to the Christian community about an integration of cosmology and theology, they ain't coming and we can't afford to be alienating anyone. . . . People are not leaving their Christian faith behind to take on the Universe Story and they don't need to, but somebody needs to help people understand that. And that seems to be a lot of what my work has evolved into.

She told a story that illustrates the ongoing challenges she faces as she expands her teaching to broader audiences, sometimes encountering more conventional perspectives. During one presentation on cosmology and theology,

there was a Dominican Priest. I was doing the cosmology. I kind of follow Miriam's [referencing Sr. Miriam Therese MacGillis, co-founder of Genesis Farm] method of cosmology and then, theology. Anyway, I was doing cosmology and as I am talking, this Dominican is sitting there with his head down, protecting himself. I am watching him. He is sitting in the front and I am thinking, "Oh God, when is he going to explode?" And I

was waiting and sure enough the hand goes up and he is like where are you getting all of this? And just on and on and on. So, I said to him, “Well, first of all, I’m not doing theology yet. I’m just talking cosmology.” And then, I don’t know if we had done the Cosmic Walk, but I kind of put the spiral [which shows the unfolding 13.7 billion year trajectory of the Universe Story] on this piece of newsprint. I said to him, “You know, theology is reflecting on God and all things in light of God and we thought this was theology [just a small piece]. Now, we turn around and we look at all this [meaning back to the Big Bang 13.7 billion years ago] . . . this is all things . . . and that has got to impact our understanding of who God is.”

This interaction illustrates the occasional, yet persistent, challenges Margaret and some of the other role models encounter with a more conservative church that is not yet embracing the broader view. She noticed some of these resistances within her, as well, when she was preparing for her vision quest and found herself asking, “What *am* I doing? Is this one big gimmick? And even the way-down deep ‘whispered’ question: ‘Is this pagan?’” As we have come to see, Margaret’s view was transformed through her extended time on the land, but others have not had similar experiences. Margaret has to keep some of her work “under the radar” and needs to be careful what she publishes because “it might bring hellfire and damnation down on you, but you just do it and keep quiet.”

In addition to her work, Margaret endeavors to live her life now in a way that is compatible with her new earth consciousness. As a religious sister, she leads a life of voluntary simplicity in response to the religious vows of poverty. Though she and three other sisters live in a conventional house in a Long Island neighborhood, the home is small by today’s standards (<1500 square feet) so their individual housing footprints are well below average. They live modestly, are conscious consumers, try to eat vegetarian, and support their local CSA. Increasingly they try to model ecological behavior for the neighborhood such as stopping all use of chemicals on their yard and composting.

Margaret would say she is not a role model because of her extensive travel schedule. But when you consider what she is doing with this travel—seeking to introduce a new perception, a new ecological and cosmological view, in conjunction with her simple and ecologically conscious life at home, I definitely consider her a role model.

She is an extraordinarily energetic woman, a change maker in her religious community, and is compelled by a feeling of urgency to act. These point to one of her significant personal sustainability challenges—overwork. She tries to live her life by the motto she heard once, “There’s very little time, therefore we must proceed very slowly.” But then she will “think about the recent climate change report and that could really make you crazy to say that what we do in the next two years... and the next 10-12 years... that could really make you crazy.” As Margaret’s journey continues to unfold, she consciously considers her consumer patterns and how she spends her time guided foremost by Thomas Berry’s statement, “The Universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.” She discerns “How is what I am about to do or not do in keeping with that?”

### **Joel and Stephan Hill**

There are many gnarly dirt roads in Vermont—I live on one of them. But when I traversed up a seemingly endless and very steep backcountry road way into the hills outside Bellows Falls, Vermont on my way to see Joel and Stephan, I thought “Wow, now this is extreme.”

Joel and Stephan were the first people I interviewed and were gracious in letting me pilot test my interview guide with them. I knew Joel from St. Michael’s Episcopal Church in Brattleboro, Vermont, the local parish I attend and where she is the Deacon. Joel also offers

leadership to the church's Outreach and Mission Committee (which includes environmental stewardship) and she tries in various ways to encourage ecological awareness and action in the church (e.g., collaborating with Vermont Interfaith Power and Light on various local programs). The interview was the first time I had met her husband and sustainable journey partner, Stephan, or been to their home.

As I crept up the mountain, I noticed that the traditional "lifelines" to the rest of civilization were falling away—no more utility poles. Since they were the first role models of sustainable living I interviewed, I was unsure of what to expect, but I was not disappointed. Eventually I broke through the trees to see first a wind turbine, then a large array of solar panels, and eventually a cozy super-insulated "green" home. My time with Stephan and Joel was delightful and informative as I learned much about sustainability from this off-grid couple. It was perfect to kick off the data collection phase of my research by interviewing these pioneers of how to embrace a green life in retirement, a time when many others their age follow the path their son from New Jersey [who per Joel lives in a house that is way over the edge of being ecologically sound] admonished when he exclaimed, "What the hell are you doing at a time in your life when you are supposed to be kicking back at Boca Raton?" (S. Hill, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

For Joel and Stephan, they were finally fully embodying a calling toward the "green" life that began whispering to them years earlier.

## **Origins and the Call**

Joel and Stephan cannot point to a defining moment when they committed to a sustainable lifestyle. Instead, it was a journey that unfolded and deepened over time, spurred by

experiences they had in nature through camping, witnessing environmental degradation on a large scale, and becoming increasingly aware of the relationship between social and environmental justice.

Stephan charts the journey as beginning with an awakening sensibility that came from camping:

Camping was the initial impetus that set us on a road. First was perspective on food and what we ate, because we were limited [in what they could take with them]. But more so, it was the interaction with nature. We were feeling and sensing that we wanted to be more natural. About that time, in the 1980s, we became vegetarians—non-sugar, vegetarian diet.

Joel, on the other hand, identified the Iraqi war and earlier witness of Mt. Trashmore in Virginia as important moments of awareness that triggered a desire for greater personal environmental responsibility and action. The Iraqi war ignited her sense of ecological and social justice when

politically at one point [I went] through [their large] house when the Iraq thing was happening, realizing, “You know, we could house an entire Iraqi village in this house. They could have their own room, well water, roof over their heads.

Joel and Stephan were already doing some environmental things, like “composting our garbage,” but this increasing awareness of their lifestyle contrasted to that of another country stuck with Joel and appears to have deepened her ecological commitment.

The earlier witnessing of Mt. Trashmore in the 1980s also sparked their commitment to reducing waste:

We’ve always recycled. [It’s] interesting the way we are living now, recycling seems like, hmmm, big deal; doesn’t everyone? Also, we were consciously trying to reduce the amount of trash, so, we started buying less packaged stuff. That decision was probably made in the early 1980s because we saw Mt. Trashmore in the Virginia Beach area; a huge landfill. We talked about landfills a fair amount (J. Hill, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

Now the couple considers the amount of waste they generate as a measure of how successful they are in living sustainably. Because of their extensive practice of precycling, recycling, reusing, and composting, they now “put down one bag of garbage every three-four weeks” compared to their part-time neighbors from Boston who will put down a “very large bag of garbage” after a weekend visit.

Joel’s comment on how they were doing things indicates this couple’s step-by-step movement toward a sustainable way of life. Stephan said, “It was like there was a magnet at the end and we didn’t know where the end was, but we just kept going in that direction.” The threads were certainly collecting but they had not yet made a quilt.

At the beginning of their married lives together, almost 50 years at the time of the interview, Stephan and Joel moved a few times and were especially influenced by extended camping trips when they lived near the Boundary Waters. Their work lives were in the cities of Flint, Michigan and then Toledo, Ohio for about a 10 year period, during which they spent extended time paddling, camping, and otherwise exploring nature throughout the Boundary Waters wilderness area. This extensive lake, island, and forested wilderness became a second home to them—not just a material home, but a spiritual home in many ways. During the interview Stephen spoke the most about these experiences and their impact, although Joel was nodding in agreement:

We took the canoe and took to that area and that was life itself, at least for me. It was a personally moving experience for me to be able to camp in the wilderness. And again, here we continued to change in terms of what we were eating. We became more aware of our impact on nature. We became more and more aware of how we affected nature and we wanted to begin to change that. So, the idea of recycling and what we ate became very much part of our lives. And we talked about that with regards to how we raised our children and what we expected of them.

This exceptional time in the Boundary Waters clearly planted the seeds for their unfolding sustainability journey and provided a nurturing and numinous (and sometimes challenging and exhilarating with the frequent storms and winds) environment for the roots to sprout. For the longest time, however, the journey unfolded organically without stated intention. Stephan commented that

camping put us on the road [but] we did not get on the road with the intention of being green. Rather it met a lot of needs in us, but it took us, slowly and surely, in a direction that began to develop in our minds about what we wanted. The question about philosophy or creed is an interesting one; in our lives, we are an eclectic people. We kind of just pick things up as we go along. I certainly relate to the concept of a philosophy. I cannot sit here and develop some broad philosophical framework. We did not sit down and develop a broad framework of what we wanted to do. It was an intuitive, emotional experience for us that this . . . hey, let's do recycling, become vegetarians. And, it fit together with what we were comfortable with and what we learned camping and being in nature; being in the wilderness and enjoying what was natural as opposed to what was artificial and so we just went in that direction.

Joel and Stephan's "practice" of camping had the effect of building a relationship with the "Other" (whether nature, Divine, or both) in the manner spiritual teachers and sustainability educators write about. When they were describing their camping experiences, it was clear they were important to them, had pierced their hearts, and were formative. Even years later, they could recall tales and emote deep feelings about the connection (especially Stephan).

Sustainability guru Jim Merkel (2003) equated the sustainability journey to falling in love.

Catholic contemplative leader and teacher Thomas Keating described the spiritual journey as one of relationship with four deepening stages (i.e., acquaintanceship, friendliness, friendship, and union of life; Keating, 1992, p. 11). Joel and Stephan, with their increasing commitment to and connection with nature (especially in the Boundary Waters) demonstrated these deepening stages. The acquaintanceship phase began when they began camping. It expanded and deepened into the more committed relationship stages because Stephan and Joel kept showing up; camping

and canoeing in the Boundary Waters became an undeniable part of their lives and their spirituality:

(Stephan) [Regarding] spiritual experiences [and] camping: For me there is a divine aspect to what I experience out there and what happens there in nature, but not in a practical sense in that I read the Bible and there are certain passages that speak to me in terms of being green. That's not part of it for me. But certainly the experience of being out there and seeing what is out there—there has to be a spiritual, a divine aspect to that.

And, it brought them to the spiritual edge of surrender. In recounting one particularly bad storm and potentially life-threatening conditions, Stephan commented:

It was a threatening experience. Finally we got around the land and the campsite was open and we pulled the canoe up and we put up the tent, hung the food bag, climbed into the tent—a bag was wet. We were in one sleeping bag, pulled everything we had over us . . . If there was a time I believed in God, that was it. There is an expression, “You can't be an atheist in a foxhole.” Some dispute that so I won't say that, but this was a time I said, “I need help; I can't do this by myself.”

Despite their deepening spiritual and sustainability journeys, the full commitment had not yet taken hold. Part of it was likely due to timing—in many ways these two pioneers, now in their seventies, were ahead of the awareness curve to a sensibility that is only now emerging for many people. They began waking up to environmental responsibility before the knowledge of what to do and options for how to do it were widely available, so they were limited in their choices. Also, they had some personal needs, like desire for a large home, to balance their family life. Their call deepened, as did their response, once their children left home.

After their time in the Midwest and near the Boundary Waters, Stephan, Joel, and their children moved east to rural Hagerstown, Maryland in 1981. The following excerpt from the interview, showing the interaction between Joel and Stephan, indicates their emerging consciousness once their life circumstances began to shift:

(Stephan) During this time [1981-2003], the idea of living in a large house was important to us. We wanted space, and space for the kids, and we liked old houses. We had not

begun to think in terms of a small housing footprint. But, in Hagerstown, we had a large house that was hard for us to justify, especially as the kids began to move out. We both had some uncomfortable feelings in this very big house once the kids all moved out. So, we moved to Baltimore for a year while Joel was retiring. (Joel) In that year, Stephan did a lot of reading about small houses, solar, sustainability, building green, straw bale, the whole nine yards. That's all you were doing while I was working. (Stephan) I enmeshed myself in the whole thing. I had retired at that point. I came up here and investigated Vermont for a place to live. [At first] found it frustrating to find a place, but then, found where they live now: small, green, off grid. Maxed it out as much as possible [and] accelerated green thinking once we moved here.

### **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

A journey that was initiated through camping, and strengthened through a lifetime of increasing awareness and additive sustainability steps as their knowledge and opportunities grew, accelerated to the level of role model status when they moved to Vermont. They set an intention and crossed the threshold to a new way of living (they consider it a “jump shift”) with their move to Vermont in 2004. After his retirement, Stephan had a year to steep in sustainability literature and educational opportunities. He went to Vermont with the *intention* of finding an off-grid, small-sized, energy-efficient, and otherwise green home. Joel dived in with both feet once she retired from her job in the city of Baltimore and both of them arrived to their remote off-grid location in Vermont. Like many threshold transitions, the journey has not always been smooth. They soon found themselves on the “road of trials” (Campbell, 1973):

(Joel) The thing we have not really hit on here—this evolution—we made a jump shift from electric lights, oil furnace and big house, and lots of community—we had lived in the community for 20 years, [I was] very involved in Diocesan work, in church work—and boom, we sell the house and in the course of 12 months, we are in a brand new community, brand new lifestyle, and in a very tiny house. That's what I mean by saying jump shift. We did not give ourselves the credit for understanding what we were going to have to do to do this. It would be one thing to have converted Mason Dixon Road [their Hagerstown house] into solar and stayed in the community, but quite another to make the conversion to living green and at the same time to figure out how to get involved in a new community. If there's been a burden on the whole thing, it's been this. That's not an easy

thing to do. When I listen to these kids in the military who have to move every two years, I can understand the trauma they go through.

Joel is more of a community person than Stephan, so the transition to remote rural living has been more challenging for her. The dialogue that ensued during the interview around the question of how they sustain themselves on the journey demonstrated the challenge and benefit of partnership in undertaking the sustainability journey. On the one hand, the shift has entailed navigating new and not always compatible ways for both of them to support their “inner sustainability.” On the other hand, both of them identify the other as the one who most supports and motivates them on the journey; Stephan and Joel demonstrate a true partnership on their quest to greener living. They were refreshingly open in discussing the challenges, which really underscored the importance of balancing outer action with “inner spirit:”

(Joel) There is the good and the bad. It is good that we are doing something for the planet, but it's bad in that it is darn inconvenient. It would be a whole lot easier to live . . . that is the difference between you and me. Stephan is happy as a clam up here; I would much rather be around people and in the city. I could move to New York if I could afford it and be very content; walk across Central Park and go to church at St. Bartholomew's, but I would end up in a divorce and that's not a good thing. (Stephan) Yeah, we've been together for 48.5 years, so why would we want to be separated? This is all part of this lifestyle issue that we have come to grips with or are trying to come to grips with since we moved up here. Living off the grid and out of the way like this demands change and it hasn't been easy. (Joel) Right, but it's about inner spirit. You, Stephan, your inner spirit fits beautifully [here] and your inner spirit is much more compatible with [this] than my inner spirit. If you want to use Jung, our MBTI's [Meyer's Brigg Personality Test] are different. Stephan is “INTP” [more introverted] and I am ENFP [more extraverted].

Despite his affinity for more remote, wooded settings, Stephan also shared some bumps in the road:

I'm not consciously aware that somehow it's been difficult. Having said that, though, there are a couple of things: (1) Last July—a year ago July—we got hit by lightning and it wiped out everything (solar, converters, everything). I suppose I may have said at some point . . . [Joel interjected, “Ooooh, this is a challenge.”] I don't know that I want this, but I don't recall that I went into the dumps. You just take care of the stuff that you need to take care of. . . . The other thing is, having fixed up a house in Hagerstown, sold that,

moved into Baltimore, put all our stuff into storage, lived in a one bedroom apartment in Baltimore for a year, packed up again, come up here, found a place to live, moved up here, brought everything up here, and then began the process of remodeling the house—that process, moving into a new community, knowing nobody, making adjustments; there was a lot of stress there. Not so much that we are going green, but all that process, that would include dealing with the house, has had significant stress.

Joel and Stephan remain, however, committed to the road they are on. They support each other and also are supported by the sustainability network that characterizes Vermont:

(Stephan) We've done programs at Yestermorrow [near Waitsfield, Vermont]. That organization is very green oriented and that impact reinforced the direction we were heading. This was an incremental process where we slowly and surely became more and more aware about what was important to us about how we lived. Since we've been here, we have been part of a Sustainability Discussion group (1.5 years) [sponsored by the] Vermont Earth Institute [and we] got together almost once per week.

Religion and routine spiritual practice did not play a significant role in supporting them on the sustainability journey although Joel identified her church community as a significant overall support (even though she wished the church would “be doing more . . . to put their money where their mouth is and do something about it”) and both connected spiritually with the natural world. Religion was important in establishing some foundational ethics, however; they are influenced in their decision making by a strong sense of eco-justice. At first, religion motivated Joel primarily through a human perspective, that of community. In the following excerpt from our interview she indicated how diving deep into the scriptures and teaching them to others dropped her into a deeper understanding and commitment:

Certainly in the Gospels there are models. Jesus going out and saying travel lightly, take only one cloak, one pair of shoes. And I do remember a pivotal time in my journey back in the late 1970s when I took job as DRE (Director of Religious Education) at an Episcopal church outside Toledo and I had to write a curriculum for the Sunday school. So, I sat down and *really read* the Gospel and I remember sitting there and saying to myself, “Oh, that's what this is all about.” We were involved in the Peace Corps; involved with our church in Alexandria; we did a lot of stuff, but it was mostly out of the humanistic kind of thing, a social/sociology kind of thing. It was because we had to be concerned about others. Not so much because of the Gospels, but because Harvey Cox [a

pre-eminent theologian] said we had to think about the community of the city. I remember in '77 when I started writing the curriculum I really got that this guy (Jesus) had a message about how we could live together in community. I was studying it, reading it, trying to translate it for the kids and then someone came along and said, let's just buy it from *Living the Good News*; but I remember that I kind of mark that experience as "Ah, that's why I go to church, that's what I am supposed to be about." But Jesus did not do it for ecology, he did it for community.

Over time, this initial "humanist" perspective began to widen to include broader sense of community, including natural community, although Joel remains very strongly motivated by an eco-justice perspective. Both of them consider a "conservation creed" to underlie their sustainability commitment:

(Stephan) Well, conservation is my creed. [Joel nods yeah.] There is a real lifestyle change that must occur if you are going to pursue conservation. It is easy to talk heroically, but that's a lot of garbage because there is nothing heroic about what we are doing. I think you make some decisions for yourself about where you want to be and those decisions mean you make changes and those changes are demanded about how you want to live. It's frustrating and anxiety producing at times, but it is an expression of yourselves and where you want to go. It's a path we've chosen. Yeah, there is a philosophy: conservation. (Joel) There is an image: Every time I come back home... there is an A-frame on our road and they live outside of Boston [and] usually there [are] two cars (big SUVs). Right off they have two vehicles they are driving from Arlington. And I am always taken by the very large bag of garbage. We put down one bag of garbage every three-four weeks and I am thinking, "In one weekend, they can put down more than we do in a month." I am thinking, "They are not about conservation, but having a place to get away from the city."

Both of them agree they are motivated by ethics:

(Stephan) It's a moral issue having to do with me as an individual and my place under the sun; it's a significant moral or ethical issue that has become more significant because of the way we as Americans live our lives. (Joel) It's about ethics, about living in a house even this small that could house quite a few people when you think about Afghanis, Iraqis—small villages where they are living on a dollar a day.

Through their shared journey of accumulating knowledge, building connection with the natural world, and deepening their understanding of social and environmental justice Joel and Stephan reached the place where "you stop talking and do something" (S. Hill, personal

communication, November 14, 2007). Both emphasize the importance of taking incremental steps in an increasingly sustainable journey:

Some of the times I am most stymied are when I say I am going to do this great change that I become incapable of starting—so overwhelmed. Small actions lead to more [actions] and slowly but surely overtime, we find we are doing more and more; it is not overwhelming, we can do it (S. Hill, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

Step by step, these two people made the shift and are modeling an alternative retirement lifestyle for a sustainable 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Jan Lorah**

Jan's recent life has been marked by tragedy and that has formed her. The nature and influence of these events will be revealed later in this profile, but beginning in late 2005 Jan unexpectedly found herself plunged into the "thin space" (Borg, 2003) and rite of passage (Eberle, 2006) that death presents. She acknowledged in our interview that a remarkable string of family health crises and deaths "really has shaped her to be who I am." The seeds for her spiritual and sustainability journeys were planted much earlier, but the "world rattling" (Plotkin, 2003) nature of life events spurred new growth.

Jan's sustainability journey is less a conversion and more a restoration and deepening commitment to an earlier awareness and interest that began when she was an adolescent. Like so many people, however, Jan began to compromise aspects of herself to meet the expectations of others and to support their needs. This happened for Jan during her marriage and she entered a time where many of her spiritual and sustainability values were modified or compromised by external events. Theologian Marcus Borg (2003) considers this pattern to be a common aspect of the human condition and equates it to a time of "exile" from one's "true self" (p. 117). Jan's

situation was not as extreme as what occurs for many, and her story indicated that she retained a strong thread of connection to her faith and sustainability roots even though external circumstances sometimes made it difficult to fully express. For Jan, the seeds of consciousness were certainly planted, but not flourishing. It took experiences overseas, personal unhappiness, tragedy, and the support of others for her to step more fully onto the path toward a life she had long been seeking.

I have to confess that when I was traveling to Jan's home for the interview and found myself driving first through the sprawl and blatant commercialism of Myrtle Beach, South Carolina and then into a KOA campground, I thought this had to be a mistake. But then I saw a tiny trailer with an Earth Flag prominently displayed. Life circumstances brought Jan to this most unusual place, but this place turned out to be a platform for healing and for transforming her to a deeper spiritual and sustainable commitment. Like others, her journey seemed to unfold as a "call within a call." Also, like some of the other role models, Jan bears witness that a commitment to sustainability can occur in the most unlikely places.

## **Origins**

Jan remembers very clearly when the seeds of her sustainability awareness were planted. She attributes the moment to a school teacher and an experience participating in a stream cleanup in high school. Considering when this event occurred, 1969-1970, before the environmental movement took hold, Jan was fortunate to have this opportunity offered by an ecologically enlightened other:

The first time I became aware was in the tenth grade, 1969-70. I had a history teacher, Miss Birch, that in addition to teaching us history, we did a unit on recycling and

cleaning up and environmental concerns. We went out and did a stream cleaning project. Back in 1969 and 1970 this was kind of early thinking for anything regarding sustainability, but this was a powerful and impactful thing to go out and put on waders and go into the stream and pull out all this debris that people were throwing away and to realize how wasteful we were. So that really started me on the path toward that, way back when.

Even though it was “way back when,” the experience remained formational. At the end of our interview, one that covered many topics from life and death to her rich and deepening relationship with her faith and new connection with the Orthodox Church, I asked her again about origins. Jan’s response clearly indicated the importance of childhood and adolescent experiences in planting seeds of consciousness that exist for a lifetime, even though they may go dormant for long periods of time:

I still think that for me it was cleaning out the streams as a child, because prior to that, I was pretty much oblivious. But being there in the midst of that dirty water (Alpine Creek in Charlotte; then it was horrible), I really came face to face with what it was we were doing to our world in a very powerful way.

When Jan got married in 1978, in her early twenties, she found herself needing to compromise some long-held values in order to support her husband’s military career. His career, however, also opened doors to other ways of living that helped hone some her sustainability ethics and practices. As she was describing this period of her life, I got the image of someone holding scales—one side presented actions and activities that supported her core values, while the other side held those she had to moderate or keep inside. Depending on the time and experience, the scales were not always balanced. For example, Jan had a significant wakeup call early in her marriage:

I remember that when I got married (1978)—I married an officer in the Army—we moved first to Colorado Springs, Colorado, and there was a protest because there was a new nuclear power plant being built in Denver and I was going to go [to the protest]. And he told me that I was not allowed to do that. As the spouse of an Army officer, I was

legally not allowed to do that and that was quite a shock to me to realize that there was anybody that could tell me I could not . . . that was a damper to be confronted with that, because as a new bride I wasn't going to upset my husband's career or upset the apple cart. So I did not go to that protest, and I was disappointed, but [I also knew] there were choices I could still make that didn't involve that.

One of the opportunities Jan had through her marriage was extended time living in Europe, a region long known for its green sensibilities and a place many from the United States go to study sustainability (Beatley, 2000):

One of our first duty stations after that [time in Colorado] was in Europe and Europeans have been recycling so much longer than us. In fact, one town we lived in it was mandatory, so it became a way of doing business real early in my adult life because of living in Europe. I remember with a young child choosing to only use disposable diapers as a second choice and washing them when I could. We always lived someplace where I could have a clothesline to hang clothes outdoors. [These were] really simple choices, but still choices that I could make. [Another thing] that happened with living in Europe was I became keenly aware and disappointed with how disposable American Society was, from saving historic buildings that were being retrofitted and used [to] keeping the temperatures in the houses cool. It was all about energy consumption and being aware of what it was because the Europeans don't have a lot of land and they make really good use of it. . . . I came away from living in Europe with a really deep appreciation of sustainability.

At the outset of her marriage, Jan also began to compromise some of her religious practices. She grew up "going to church every Sunday" and attending Sunday school unless the family was at their lake cottage. She was raised Methodist and then Presbyterian and maintained those roots and church attendance practices throughout college because "that was just the way you did things." She married someone who did not believe in God and her involvement with a church became spotty:

It was only after I married the army and began moving around the world that my church attendance became more irregular and mostly because . . . Well, I married a guy who doesn't believe in God and it was an issue of Sunday mornings having a chance to be with him, as opposed to going to church.

Things radically shifted when they had their first (and only) child, a daughter. Even though Jan's practice of going to church had dropped off, her commitment to her faith remained strong. When her husband "looked at me and said 'If you want her to be a Christian, it is going to be your responsibility, because when she turns 18 years old I will tell her the truth,'" Jan was shocked into remembering and reclaiming some of her core values:

Wow, talk about getting yourself up off the couch and back into church; and so she and I attended military churches which were at best awash because from one Sunday to the next you'd never know who was going to be in the pulpit, but we went. And then, when we moved to Northern Virginia, she was in the fifth or sixth grade, we started attending church every Sunday and she absolutely loved it.

I suspect Jan loved it, too. Her return to church began a long journey home to a deeper part of herself. In many ways, Jan's early seeds of sustainability, and her commitment to a religious practice, went dormant with her marriage. The seeds were still there, but the conditions were not right for them to fully bloom. Plotkin (2008) writes that "Most parents recognize their commitment to their children to be as sacred as their commitment to their own souls" (p. 236). When Jan had her daughter, she was shocked into remembering vital parts of herself that had been compromised and she began to seriously pursue her religious and spiritual yearnings. She and her daughter shared a journey through a supportive church community that brought Jan to a deeper awareness.

Jan's story points to the promise of religious institutions in supporting sustainability. It was through her church that Jan began to hear the call to something more. There, at the Burke Virginia Presbyterian Church, Jan encountered many of the factors Gardner (2006) identified as positive reasons for churches to be involved in sustainable development. In particular, she encountered (1) an opportunity to participate in perception-shifting mission work, (2) a like-minded pastor, and (3) a community where she could bring programs to and teach others.

## The Call

Even though aspects of Jan's spirituality and sustainability were sometimes compromised in her marriage, the values remained with her, but they needed a supportive environment to flourish. The Burke Presbyterian Church she attended with her daughter in Northern Virginia provided that opportunity:

Truthfully, literally as long as I can remember as an adult, I've been involved in environmental/sustainability kind of issues. It wasn't any time at all before, at the church, I became recognized as the person to talk with about environmental issues.

In particular, Jan recalled the day a flyer appeared in her mailbox from a local environmental organization with a strong sustainability ethic. She shared it with her Pastor and because the opportunity to offer environmentally focused study circles was met with a favorable response, Jan found herself on a new and more supportive path. It was also one that would initiate a deeper level of reflection that shined a mirror on her personal discontent and prompted even more action and change:

[Sometime] between 1996 to 1999, there was a flyer in my mailbox from [an organization called] EcoStewards Alliance inviting me to come the next day for a potluck dinner and talk on energy efficiency in your home. I took [the flyer] to my pastor and her husband and said "we should go to this potluck dinner" and it just so happened their kitchen was being remodeled, so we went. [Pastor] Beth met Peter Kelsey [Founder of EcoStewards Alliance] and invited him to come and bring environmental study circles to the church. He came with an introductory meeting and we [started] a Voluntary Simplicity Circle. It was through that that I began to realize I was terribly unhappy with the way my life was going as far as not just external stuff, but internal stuff as well, and I really needed to focus on (1) discern what it was I really needed to be doing and (2) discern how to reach those goals. At this time, my child was in middle school, so I couldn't make radical changes, but one thing—I knew I wanted to go to Seminary and the Virginia Theological Seminary is in Alexandria and I was able to do that while she was still in school. So, I got a certificate of theology through a wonderful program that the professors teach at night. It is reasonably priced and I was able to do that in three years. I earned my certificate and stayed a mom and was teaching at a Christian Pre-School.

After the initial program, Jan maintained her connection to EcoStewards Alliance as a volunteer. When I still lived in the Washington, D.C. area I was on the Board for the organization and kept hearing about this woman, Jan Lorah, but never met her. Shortly after I stepped down from the Board in 2000, Jan was brought on as Executive Director. Through her church involvement and participant and leadership role with EcoStewards, Jan was bringing together her religious and environmental calls into the world in a new and more visible way.

Another opportunity that helped to form Jan's sustainability commitment also occurred through her church. The Burke Presbyterian Church has an ongoing connection with some Kenyan schools and groups of people travel over there every three years. Jan and her daughter shared this experience two times. Like some of the other role models, Jan's perceptions were shifted through her experience visiting and working with a developing country; she experienced different dimensions of sustainability—especially social justice—than someone from affluent Fairfax County, Virginia would commonly encounter:

They are depleting all of their natural resources because they are living barely above the sustenance level and they can't think about the fact that they are burning their forest to make charcoal to cook food. But if they didn't have the charcoal, they couldn't prepare their food. It seems easy to think that there would be another way to cook, but it would be monumental to imagine this shift because now everyone cooks outdoors, but the forests are being desecrated. And the animals are suffering because of that—their natural habitats are being burned down to make charcoal. When I went back in 1999, to the same village . . . in 1996 the village did not have electricity and when I went back in 1999, they had gotten electricity and it had nearly destroyed their little society and then I began to see the importance of helping people to recognize sustainability issues because they were just doing what they had to do to stay alive without thinking of 10 to 20 years in the future. But, they had been introduced to plastic trash bags and when they finished with one, they would simply let it go, and looking across the savannahs, there would be plastic trash bags sticking up. So, when I was there, I taught the women how to make the fabric bags to save the plastic bags so they could save them and reuse the plastic bags. But, it was perfect in that it kept them from throwing a few of them away at least.

Jan's eyes were opened to a radically different culture that was not sustainable for many different reasons. In Kenya, Jan witnessed the ravages of poverty, resource depletion and inappropriate technology. She also experienced the concept of "lived worship" because the Kenyan spirituality was so rich; she commented that "we are the ones who come home with a different body inside the skin we had when we went over—it is only a life changing experience."

From my interview with Jan, I observed that these experiences and opportunities—having a child, returning to church, participating with EcoStewards Alliance, and traveling to a developing country—began shifting Jan to a deeper level of faith and commitment to sustainability. The journey started with her return to church after her daughter was born, but grew to enfold faith and ecological concerns more clearly. From my perspective looking in, it appears that Jan more boldly and outwardly claimed her sense of "calls within calls." She stepped into a leadership role with EcoStewards Alliance *and* she attended seminary to get a Certificate of Theology. With her husband and the military lifestyle she had encountered "serious clashes or contradictions" and through her participation with a supportive church community, the EcoStewards Study Circles, and her own practices, she began critically reflecting on her life, beliefs, and practices. This process indicates a significant shift to a deeper and more mature stage of faith (Fowler, 1995, p. 173).

### **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

Jan's journey reached another level when she encountered a staggering amount of personal tragedy beginning in 2005. She was forced by circumstances to take stock of her life, her path, and her desires. The series of "earth shattering" events "when something happens that makes you stop and look where you are" began in November 2005 when her step-sister

committed suicide. They were only “about 11 months apart in age” and the experience “ripped [Jan] to [her] core that this was the choice she made.” Jan shared with me during the interview, “I knew I did not want to get so desperate that I did that” so she began discerning in earnest about the course of her life.

She crossed the threshold toward a new way when the tragedies persisted. Jan summarized an unbelievable series of events in her interview:

By then, my daughter graduated college and it was that time of my life when I could make other choices. That was November and we had her [step-sister’s] funeral in Charlotte, North Carolina. I came back here [Sunset Beach, North Carolina, where I interviewed Jan] to the beach with my mom and step-dad. While I was here, mom got sick. The doctor said, “I think you have pancreatic cancer.” Those are the sorts of things that make you say, “okay.” She lived six months. Since then, there have been eight people that have died in my immediate circle (especially family): my mom, my step-dad, my father, step-sister, brother-in-law (both of these suicide), uncle, cousin (just choked to death at the dinner table)—all from November 2005. My Dad died Palm Sunday of this year (2007). Since then, an uncle, cousin, brother-in-law. It’s just been . . . It really has shaped me to be who I am.

In his book *Soulcraft*, eco-depth psychologist Bill Plotkin suggested that the passage to a more authentic self—*not* just a “mere glimpse of depth or sacredness in everyday life” but a “profound restructuring of self-concept, of who and what we experience ourselves and the world to be”—can be so disruptive to our day-to-day self, our ego, that it “can hardly occur except during a profound trauma” (Plotkin, 2003, pp. 316-317). While some cultures have rites of passage ceremonies and/or extended wanderings or pilgrimages to support this transformation, in “ego-centric” societies such as the United States, it often takes “highly traumatic personal crises including major physical trauma . . . loss of a well-established primary relationship (through death or separation) . . . an extreme life event that impels us to reexamine everything” to release the old ways and move toward the new and more spiritually authentic path. Plotkin (2003) concludes his discussion of this transformational process by noting very clearly that, “A life of

soul is not likely to be initiated in the routine course of an everyday American life” (p. 319). In some situations and for some people, this transformational door to “a life of soul” requires “trauma and ego defeat” (p. 319). While it is presumptuous of me to imply any depth of knowledge of Jan’s journey from our time-limited interview, her words speak of such a passage:

It was life situations all coming together at one time that made it an easy decision for me because it was truly a choice of going back to what was or moving forward to what it was I hope to do, so it was an easy choice in that concern . . . When people die, everything comes back to its basic elements. . . . But I think it is because death and dying brings you “right there,” in touch. Now I do Chaplaincy work at the hospital and I tell people when I am working with them [that] in my opinion there are two most precious times of our lives: when we are born and when we die. These are very sacred. With that in mind, everything is in much sharper focus. [These experiences] made me more keenly aware of the importance of the conservation of time as an element of our being that is being abused as much as our natural resources; the greater time that we, as small specks on this planet, have a chance to make a difference. If I am called to lead a certain life; it needs to be now—not a year from now. It needs to be every breathing moment that I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. I am staying here. I am making these choices for a simpler, more sustainable life and I have to LIVE THOSE CHOICES. I feel like I’ve finally reached that simpler life I’ve been seeking for so long.

This quote indicates a significant shift for Jan; she made the choice to change her life and live in accordance with her deepest values without compromise. In October 2006, Jan decided that she would not return to Virginia, but that she would stay in North Carolina and enroll in a training program to be a Chaplain. She “left behind in Virginia a husband, three pets, and a 10 room house.” Consciously leaving behind the old marks the threshold transition Campbell (1973) documented and implies a shift that Plotkin (2008) calls soul initiation:

Soul Initiation is that extraordinary moment in life when we cross over from psychological adolescence to true adulthood, from our first adulthood to our second. It is when our everyday life becomes firmly rooted in the purposes of the soul. The embodiment of our soul qualities becomes as high a priority in living as any other (p. 271).

Borg (2003) considers this “process [to be] at the heart not only of Christianity, but of the other enduring religions of the world.” For Christians, he noted, the new “way involves a new heart, a

new self centered in God” (Borg, 2003, p. 119). Jan, already rooted in Christianity and already a self-professed woman of faith, was transformed by her life events and her critical reflection of them to a faith stage of deeper commitment, self expression, and “self-actualization” (Fowler, 1995, p. 182). This was a process that began earlier for her, but often was contained from full expression by her life circumstances. The tragedies that formed Jan prompted her to seek out a more authentic religious expression; to shake up her “Calvinistic up-bringing” and recognize other ways and opportunities for worship, including time in nature; and to radically simplify her life.

Her faith sustained her during these difficult times, as guide, companion, and supporter. In particular, her prayer life and communication with God strengthened. For example, when Jan was discerning whether or not to return to Virginia after arriving in North Carolina and discovering her mother’s (and others’) illnesses, she ventured to the beach for a long walk and prayer; she was in a place of open-hearted surrender and

managed to find a few hours to escape to the beach to have a heart-to-heart talk with God. *“Am I supposed to stay? I need a sign.”* I had never before asked God for a sign, but this time I did. I knew there wasn’t anyone else who was able to take the time to fully devote to the caretaking duties; but what about other obligations, to church, family, friends and my job? *“If I am meant to stay, God, please send me a sign – something tangible that will spell this out beyond a shadow of a doubt.”* The beach that I walked is normally nearly devoid of shells—just a beautiful, clean-swept carpet upon which one can tread without fear of cutting a foot or crushing a treasure. Certainly one never found sand-dollars that were intact—only crushed bits and pieces. I walked the length of the island; half-way expecting that there would be no answer for me today. Upon return path I was surprised, and then delighted, as first one—and then another—and then a third, sand dollar were deposited at my feet by incoming waves. I gathered them ever so gently in my hands while tears flowed down my cheeks. These three sand dollars represented the Trinity to me in that moment and I knew that God was with me for this leg of my journey (Lorah, 2008).

It was during this same period of time, especially during her long walks on the beach, that Jan came to see and experience the power, beauty and potential of nature as a sacred space for

worship. She was already a lover of earth and environmental issues, but a shift occurred and she let go of some long-held beliefs about worship; her understanding of nature and religion, of the environmental call within the religious call, were coming together in a different way:

[After Jan completed “seminary in the 1990s and graduated Seminary in 2000” she “decided not to take a more” formal role, although she became increasingly involved with her Presbyterian Church.] My goal was never to be a Pastor; I just wanted to live it. “I’m just going to live it.” That is all I have ever hoped to do—“is just live it.” So, I’ve taught Sunday school, taught pre-school in a religious environment, went to church every Sunday, then the crises with death and dying and in the last three months, I’ve shaken that Calvinistic up-bringing and [began] being able to recognize that being out there by the ocean is equally worshipful as being inside a building. I don’t have to be inside a building with all the trappings that come with it, but I can be outside on the oceanside and have equally wonderful if not better worship experience. That was huge. It was a lot for me to dump all that Calvinistic upbringing to be able to come to that and it was so freeing to recognize that.

Jan also recognized that her old church, the one that had supported her journey back to church and provided more opportunities for expressing and living her sustainability, no longer served in the same way. She was being called to a different form of faith expression that better matched her yearning for a religion that honored and preached about creation care. She discovered the Orthodox Church (Note: the Patriarch is considered an international leader on expressing the need for sustainability and was honored as first place in *Grist* magazine’s 2007 issue on green religious leaders). Because the Orthodox Church is so strongly rooted in creation care, it has strengthened Jan’s sustainability journey especially through its worship, creation-centered meditation, and prayer practices:

I became interested in the Orthodox Church in about August 2005, but I was serving as an elder in the Presbyterian Church, but then people started dying. Sometimes you find in life that the pause button gets pushed more often than not. So, I still do attend Orthodox services and know that some day I will make the final step to be Chrismated in the Orthodox Church and I am comfortable with that. I use Orthodox materials in my own daily meditations and read everything I can get my hands on, but the Orthodox Church is really involved in work for the environment and sustainability and recognizing the relationship between the creator and the creation and that speaks to me very strongly.

. . . I loved the [Presbyterian] worship service I attended in Virginia—the Pastor is creative and the services done with a flair—but I began to feel it was more a Christian Lawrence Welk show than a worship service and not as deep a service as I long for. I can still go and be entertained in a Christian sort of way [but] I needed something much more than that. And, the church membership began to feel like a kind of Christian social club and I wanted more than that, so I moved from Protestant religions to Orthodoxy.

When Jan chose to leave her old life and step into the unknown new one she admitted that it “felt sad, like I’ve failed, but on the other hand I know it is the only way I can survive.” She made the choice to stay in North Carolina and create the “simpler, more sustainable life” she had always yearned for. It became vital for her to live with “conjunctive faith” (Fowler, 1995, p. 184):

It became really important for me to live in accordance; to live on the outside in accordance to what I was feeling on the inside. That is how it was that I made the choice to stay here and live in the little small trailer; because of the Fairfaxedness issue and I did not have the need for a big house anymore and living in that way was so contrary to what I was espousing in my outward life, so making those outward choices was an easier way for me to feel I was living in alignment with what my beliefs were.

Jan left behind “Fairfaxedness,” a condition she described as a disease that everyone that lives there has and you cannot escape unless you leave.” As one symptom of the disease (dis-ease), she explained, “There is so much disposable income that people get so wrapped up in how they are going to use their money they forget how they are going to live their lives.”

Jan made a conscious decision to live a different way. Her sustainability ethic is one of voluntary simplicity:

I bought my tiny gypsy wagon, which I don’t imagine there is a single thing environmentally conscious about the construction of my gypsy wagon, however the consumption of the natural resources to keep it running is so minimal compared to having a house. And the mortgage payment I’m not making means I don’t have to drive to work every day to support an income to support my lifestyle. . . . All my choices for sustainability are limited by what goes inside my trailer. A big part of what I have is recycled (e.g., I have chairs from two different friends; my front porch is 3 palettes from

the carpeting shop; the baskets come from the farmer's market; the grill is a hand me down). And, that is the way things are done in the campground.

Jan measures her success in living sustainably through the small amount of garbage she generates. She also is the only role model who actively engages in a barter economy in order to keep her life simplified and removed from the capitalist system:

[Regarding money]: I live on almost nothing, literally. I barter for a lot. At the coffee shop I do their marketing in exchange for free coffee and a discount on my food. They don't pay me. I don't want a salary that I will have to pay taxes on.

Her strong faith and her spiritual practices support her sustainability journey. She sees them as inseparable. During our interview, it quickly became clear how authentic and deeply faithful Jan is—not only in her conversation and choice of words, but with the ease and intimacy with which she references “God the Creator” who is clearly an integral sustainer and partner for her journey:

I really can't separate our stewardship of the planet from the magnitude of the gift of this planet and the greater Essence—greater than just the planet, but of all the universe—because I really think that—strongly believe—I believe that our being here is a gift and that how we choose to use that gift determines . . . it shapes all of . . . not just my life, but your life and everybody else's life. If I was abusive of our planet (e.g., dumped oil on the ground after changing car) it would of course impact what would happen to my children's children children, but at the same time it is almost a slap in the face to God the Creator to think that I could so easily throw away something that is such a precious gift. I can't do that.

Jan honors this relationship through her spiritual practices, especially prayer, meditation, art, and music. She has a deep prayer life that includes meditation, periodic fasting that tracks with the Liturgical year, reading, study, and reflective writing. She frequently takes these more traditional expressions of faith down to the beach and so blends expressions of the “old” with her new connection to nature as place of worship. Jan also is an artist and musician—they are “just part of who I am.” But, they provide deeper expressions for her to show her love for creation and

Creator. For example, Jan showed me a gorgeous “creation quilt” she made from symbolic scraps of cloth gathered throughout her life. The story on the quilt interweaves her personal creation journey with “The” Creation journey. In her tiny trailer the quilt maintains a prominent wall position that offers daily reminder and assurance of her principle inspiration and sustainer—God.

Even though Jan is aware of how limited her sustainability choices are in this part of the south, she is building community and experiencing the peace and freedom no traffic, fewer choices, and a dramatically simplified life provide. Jan summed up her current status “an incredible life compared to living in Fairfax.”

This former Fairfax County Executive Director, teacher, mother, wife, and religious leader explained her transformation this way:

One day – I really knew I had come home. The Kid over there [pointing to another part of the campground] is having issues with his personal life and he came to knock on my door and said grab your fishing pole and for an hour and a half, we stood in the rain and talked, and I said to myself—this is what life is really about. This is really what life is about and I don’t have to do any more than that to know that I’ve fulfilled what I am supposed to be doing.

Admittedly Jan was in transition when I interviewed her and it would be interesting to see where she is some years from now. For now, her environmental ministry has taken on a more personal note—she teaches and preaches it through living it and through bearing witness and quiet evangelizing to others:

I think it is the grassroots level. Meeting people face to face in small group gatherings... in close situations is the only way that is going to work. And that is why I think I make a difference around here, just at the coffee shop or wherever else I happen to talk with people... even though they may laugh at me, they think about it afterwards. . . . I had a discussion with a man one day; he had just graduated from seminary and we were having coffee together and he stirred his coffee with a plastic stirrer. I asked if I could have his plastic stirrer after he was done with it and he said, “It is just a plastic straw, throw it in the trash.” And I said that it all comes down to stewardship—you have to know that

throwing away that straw is—you are defacing God when you throw away that straw. He was highly insulted and exclaimed, “How could you say something like that; it is just a plastic straw.” And I said, “But think about it. What went into making that plastic straw, where do you think those petroleum products came from? It is not just petroleum that was taken out of the ground, but it’s God who made the petroleum and who put it into the ground and now you’ve taken it and dropped it into the trash can.” And he almost cried. He said, “Hand it to me, I am going to put it in my pocket and take it with me and I will never throw it again.”

Through an extraordinary series of life events Jan has achieved the desire she expressed when she graduated from Seminary in 2000. Her goal “was never to be a pastor, I just wanted to live it.” She stated “That is all I have ever hoped to do...is just live it. . . I’m just gonna live it.”

Regardless of her future path, the combination of events propelled her to the place that Fowler (1995) describes as “porous and permeable;” with her faith and spiritual practices, she navigated the underworld journey of soul (Plotkin, 2003). Because of these events and how Jan transformed them into opportunities for reflection, practice, and significant spiritual growth, her long-standing seeds of sustainability took hold with deep roots. From her story, and by sharing time with her in person, I experienced Jan as someone who might have studied and taught about the “tree of life” in her previous life, but was now re-born as it. Regardless of the future turns in her journey, I strongly sensed from our interview that she had stepped firmly into her authenticity, and will remain firm to her commitment, both to God and earth. I sense she is someone who will “just live it,” where who she is shines through without compromise.

### **Rob Schnabel**

When I arrived at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation’s Annapolis Headquarters to interview restoration scientist Rob Schnabel, I was surprised to also experience a showcase and mini-tutorial for sustainable building design and business development. Perched on the shores of the

Chesapeake Bay, the Merrill Center is a recognized model of energy efficiency and conservation and green building techniques.<sup>xix</sup> From the moment you walk through the entrance, one feature after another indicates a sustainable way. I thought it would be very challenging to work in a place like this and not be influenced to live a more sustainable life. Certainly the prolific examples of green building influenced Rob, because he also seeks to model energy efficiency and other sustainable practices in all of his choices, from housing to food.

Rob, his wife and two children, live in a small historic downtown Annapolis house (<2,000 square feet) that they've retrofitted with geothermal heat for greater energy efficiency even though the expense was steep for two people working in the nonprofit sector. They made a similar conscious choice to stretch their resources when purchasing a hybrid car. Both of these choices and others they make in order to live more sustainably were:

pricey, but I decided I want to do the right thing. I'd never owned a new car before so it was a big investment for me. Working in a nonprofit you are not making that much money, but everywhere I can, as I learn about different things, I add something new to what I do to be sustainable.

Rob makes his decisions from a deep place, and with an ethical basis, developed from his connection to and love for the out-of-doors. He thoughtfully chooses sustainable options instead of what is convenient, inexpensive, and easier.

Another area Rob and his family make sustainable choices is a strong commitment to local foods and goods. They belong to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's own Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), Clagett Farm, and also are active in the farmer's market; in addition to purchasing food at the market, Rob volunteers his time. He considers volunteering, or citizen engagement, a vital part of his sustainability practice and contributes his time and talents with local government restoration initiatives and at his children's school. Rob also brings the

local community emphasis into his job as a Restoration Scientist for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. He makes a point to “preach” about local issues in his job and is especially mindful to bring farmers into the mix:

What is neat about my work, having access to so many people, I am able to push the local foods agenda when I am out in the field throughout fall and spring. I am doing restoration projects on dairy farms and beef cattle farms and after all the fencing is in and water troughs are in (for the dairy farms for getting [the cows] out of their streams), we are usually planting forest buffers along the streams and we usually have 80-100 people there and I am able to preach. Nobody likes the amount of development that is occurring, and the loss of farms, and the impacts that are happening, and the way you can help those farms is by...everybody has got to eat, so purchase your food locally if you can. I always get the farmer when I am onsite doing these restoration events to say how the community can help you farm so that you are sustainable. So it is neat that I can share that passion and encourage others to do the same thing.

In many ways Rob epitomizes the conscious consumer that all of these role models are. We had an interesting conversation about green investing during the interview and his level of questioning and awareness made me realize that I was only beginning to scratch the surface in my own discernment about green choices:

I just dig deep and get at some of the answers. I make sure in the way that people [who] are passionate about it [do]—just being aware of how your everyday decisions from everything—from getting to work, to eating, volunteering in a community setting whether it be with your homeowners group or city, getting involved politically with local decisions, just with all of that. I think it’s just critical for everyone to be aware of how... and realizing the individual small [choices and actions]. I love the Margaret Mead quote [“Never underestimate the power of a small, dedicated group of people to change the world; indeed, that is the only thing that ever has.”]. It’s always the individual that causes change, not... You know, a dedicated group can have a huge impact. A lot of folks feel that maybe they can’t change things, but the first step (now we’ll bring in the religion aspect of it)... I don’t go every week, but I really love the one quote that we had at the Quaker school that I went to... it was a George Fox quote (he was the founder of the Quaker religion), “Let your life speak.” I just see that as a practice what you preach, live in a way you want things to change, make sure you are doing it yourself.

In sharing his reasoning for “digging deep,” doing it in the way that “people [who] are passionate” about something exert care and deliberation hints at the origins of Rob’s

sustainability ethic. In his adolescence Rob experienced some life changing events that propelled him into a deep love for the out-of-doors.

## **Origins**

When Rob was 13 years old his mother passed away, which was an event that radically changed the trajectory of his life. Prior to that, he was in the public school system, “kind of floating through. . . kind of looking for, searching for what I wanted to do in life.” He defined himself as a jock at that time and considered sports his “outlet” until his mother’s death. That crisis prompted him to “somewhat reinvent [himself].”

After his mother’s death he ended up transferring to a residential Quaker private school. There, he began to learn to listen to others and learn from them “as opposed to listening to just your family and what they would preach.” Rob commented that “my dad was not at all aware of environmental type stuff, so I had to learn this on my own and it took kind of cutting off from my family and going to this new school and having my peers as sort of role models and learning from them.” The crisis of his mother’s death is what prompted the turn in “this direction or I would have probably stayed in the same school system and not necessarily met the people that I met.” Even though it happened for him at a young age, Rob’s story underscores the importance of “leaving the adolescent home” as a vital stage in psycho-spiritual maturity.

A vital part of Rob’s sustainability journey origins was interaction with his peers, who encouraged him to begin working at a summer outdoors camp as a counselor. He described it as the experience that “first got me going” on the sustainability trail. For Rob, the experience began as one of falling in love:

What first got me going was high school working at a camping program which helped me get started in my love for the outdoors. I was a counselor for a summer camp; it was set up through a Quaker organization and for 2.5 months of summer I would be taking teenagers on hiking, canoeing, climbing type trips and through that love of the outdoors, when it came time for college, I realized I wanted to work in the outdoors. It evolved from there, learning about sustainability, wanting to become sustainable and then trying to live my life in that manner. The camp was Opequon Quaker Camp, through the Baltimore Yearly Meeting which is all the Quaker meetings in the Baltimore/DC area. I went to Sandy Springs Friends School in Montgomery County, Maryland and a number of my fellow students were counselors at this camp. I thought they were great people doing it and I wanted to spend more time with them, so I applied to be one of the counselors and since then I've been an outdoors fanatic.

Another vital part of Rob's sustainability origins involved an extended time of "wandering" that Campbell (1973) and Plotkin (2003 and 2008) identify as a critical way of leaving home and stepping into a more mature, authentic adulthood. In hindsight, Rob suggested that his first time in college was "still a kind of growing up" where he was "still reeling from family stuff" so he "took time off for awhile" (involuntary time since he "actually got kicked out"). This opened doors to about a decade of wandering experiences that involved two significant events that helped form him; one entailed a mentor and the other involved traveling to another country and witnessing their ways.

After he "got kicked out," Rob:

was working in a restaurant that was close to my high school that was run in kind of a sustainable manner—the Olney Alehouse. I worked there for 10 years and the woman that owned the place was very connected to the community. All of the food went to a shelter for battered women when we were closed on Mondays. She was very supportive and she supported local agriculture with all her stuff, so she was a good influence.

Working there also set Rob up for his next big wander to a foreign country:

I saved a good bit of money and I traveled and that had a good influence on me. I went to New Zealand with my best friend and we were both counselors together and we went to New Zealand for a few months and I think going overseas is such a refreshing thing to do. I met some folks from Greenpeace; there was a lot of action stuff going on in Auckland when first came in so it was neat to see a nonprofit environmental organization, a radical group. [I said to myself] I can see jumping in and doing something like that. So

that opened my doors to kind of nonprofit being more radical and EarthFirst type thing. For awhile I was thinking maybe I'd want to do something like that: one was against the Canadian forest industry—a big banner down the side of a tower; and the other, they had a Japanese drift netting tanker and they took the prop off it. So it was neat to see that first hand.

Rob also was influenced by the way people in New Zealand lived their lives; it provided a partial vision and model for how he wanted to live his. During his travels there he was

just hitch hiking from place to place, which was a great way to travel and you'd get to meet the people that way and they were so friendly and they'd often bring you back to their house and you'd help them on their farm or whatever else. But the folks there were farmers, teachers, and great outdoorsmen at the same time. It was amazing how they did everything and they were a happy people and so meeting those folks and seeing how they [lived]. They were hard core kayakers, and farmers, and they also taught—they did everything. They weren't so narrowly focused, they weren't specialists in anything, and they were very much connected to the land. And, seeing how happy they were. That had a little bit of an influence as well.

## **The Call**

After his extended period of wandering, Rob returned to college where his intention was to be a history major so he could teach history like a teacher/mentor he had in high school. By happenstance, however, he took an

environmental ethics course in college that totally flipped me around. I knew that I also had this passion for the outdoors and I knew as a history teacher I wouldn't necessarily be in the outdoors so I decided at the last minute to add a major. It took me a few more years to get through school, but I got an environmental science degree and I knew I wanted to get into, have an impact on the planet. I wasn't exactly sure how at that point, but I knew it was most likely going to be hands on oriented and less likely policy oriented; something hands on that I can see and get immediate gratification to keep the energy going.

Rob summarized his turn toward the earth as resulting from the subject matter of the course, his more mature age and phase of life, and an inspirational teacher that set him on the new road. He also met another influential peer who steered him toward an environmental profession (and also became his wife):

I was a little bit older. I had traveled around. I'd been to New Zealand at that point. I'd been working in the camping program for even more years. And then, after taking that environmental ethics course, I just realized I was slightly outraged at what was going on and I realized what I wanted to do. At the same time, I was dating someone (who is now my wife) who was working in the environmental consulting field so I started. I then had my blinders on; here is what I can do. But before the environmental ethics course I thought I would float through, get my history major and get a teaching job.

All of the converging influences when Rob returned to college supported his deepening ecological awakening, but he highlighted the role of his environmental ethics teacher as being particularly important. The wonderful teacher “inspired” him. This teacher

started the environmental science program at the school (i.e., Hood College at Frederick). He won Maryland teacher of the year award. He was wonderful. He set up summertime coastal ecology of Maine courses; had a partnership with Duke marine lab at Beaufort, North Carolina so students could take advantage of both those areas and you just learned about different, various ecologies and the math required and the social aspects and the hard core field monitoring type stuff required for all that stuff. [It] definitely set my path of where I wanted to go.

Rob's experiences leading up to this point were instrumental in forging a strong love for the outdoors and increasing his ecological awakening and ecological identity. He was learning about sustainability, but had not yet crossed the threshold to a sustainability commitment. This shift began occurring with his first job as an environmental professional. He had achieved his yearning to be in the field, but he was working for a private developer doing mitigation work. While this time was an important training ground for Rob, it was not in alignment with his core ethics. He described a lot of his job being one of “helping developers jump through hoops to get their permits “and then do wetland or stream mitigation projects that they were required to do.” After working on the private developer side of the fence for awhile, Rob realized he was “not a total believer in mitigation” and concluded, “I did not think that impacting one area and trying to restore another area was really the way I wanted to go.” By doing this work he gained first hand knowledge of “what was sustainable and what was not—the way people lived and the way land

use was done was not sustainable.” He also knew his future would be doing restoration work as soon as a job opened up—“only doing the positive stuff; not doing permitting where we tried to make the balance because I knew the balance wasn’t working.”

Rob’s first job was in the right direction, but was not in alignment with his inner values. He attributed this mis-alignment as contributing somewhat to an angrier period of his life; a time when he was increasingly feeling the disconnect between his outer life and inner desires. This tension marks a vital Stage shift in human development as described more in Chapter 5. It is a shift experienced by all of the role models. He commented about that time of his life:

I think part of the angry time was working private consulting where I was getting paid to take things down – and yes I am restoring things somewhere else. I took that time as training time so could get where I wanted to be. But I think that was part of my anger. I wasn’t doing what I wanted to do. I felt like I am on this earth for how long and this is not what I want to do with my life. I think getting rid of the anger was getting somewhere where I was living my life in the way I wanted to live it.

Rob crossed the threshold when he took his present job with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

### **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

Rob joined the Chesapeake Bay Foundation in 2000 when they started having restoration scientists in the state offices. He “jumped at the opportunity” and “was lucky enough to get it.” Since joining CBF, Rob has significantly deepened in his sustainability journey because he is surrounded by like-minded peers, mentors, and a building that models tangible sustainability practices. One person in particular, Michael Heller who is the manager of the Clagett Farms Educational Center and CSA, is a mentor and has

had a huge influence. My big push lately is local foods, sustainable agriculture—and frankly Michael has been my mentor for that because he is such a wealth of knowledge about that; whenever I am around him I learn a ton of stuff. So since being at CBF I’ve taken trying to live my life in a sustainable way and economically supporting smaller

mom and pop shops instead of the big megacorporations (you know, the Sam's Club, the Walmarts); really trying to keep everything narrowly focused. It has just built upon people I have come to know since working at CBF.

Rob also remains connected to his interest in history and the original connection through his father to history and historic buildings. This helped form his sustainability ethic by teaching him to appreciate older things; “not just new fancy things.” It also influenced his choice of home. Currently he and his family live in a downtown historic Annapolis home that they are renovating to be more sustainable. It is a small home, so they have a below average housing footprint. It is located right downtown within a walkable community that is bicycling distance to work, so they minimize the use of their car (even though, like others, Rob points out transportation as one area he would like to be more sustainable—it is too tempting to drive the Prius the several miles to work). Regarding the areas he is unsustainable, which are really very few, Rob commented,

I'm like everybody else—we are all so busy and there is only so much time to do everything... but, if you know you are passionate about it and your overall career goal and your lifetime goal is to be sustainable, you need to make time for that. That is something I could do a better job with.

Rob's Quaker background, practice, and underlying ethic provide one of the best means he finds to counteract the culture's prevalent busyness. He's been influenced significantly by the words and life model of George Fox, founder of the Quaker religion, especially the call to “let your life speak.” These words, plus others, “really spoke” to Rob and he reflects on them “often in different situations;” they “just keep [him] going.”

Also the practice of silence and reflection that is fostered through Quaker meeting helped form Rob and sustain him:

I love the whole idea of Quaker worship. You sit in meeting; the Quaker meeting aspect of it. Not only the way everybody related to everybody on campus as a community to do different chores to keep the school going, but the meeting for worship was just a time where you basically sit in silence during meeting and if you feel moved to speak, you

speak. And the whole Quaker idea that there is God in everyone and you don't have to have somebody—you are not going through a mediator to get to God, everybody is connected to God. But sitting there and meeting to worship and it's like time stops still; especially as a teenager you are running nonstop and possibly worrying about things that on the big scale don't really have an impact. Everybody is so worried about them. Just a time to stop for me, to get grounded and to realize what is important. And, it is nice that you don't have someone preaching at you and telling you what to think, you just kind of sit back and think about what you've learned that day, how things are going, and it's just kind of a calming and grounding time. That had ... that's something I'll go to every now and have my own little meeting somewhere and often when I am in the field I'll have a little down time for a little bit if I am sitting eating lunch at a picnic table at a park, just have my own little moment of silence and relax.

Rob has an ongoing practice of creating moments where “time stops still” so he can reflect, discern, and act according to his passion for the outdoors and his underlying Quaker-influenced values. In doing so, he “let's his life speak” and models sustainability for others—through his work and his ways. His simple take home message? “Hey, you gotta practice it; do it.”

### **Nancy Sleeth**

Emerging evangelical environmental leaders Nancy and Matthew Sleeth are casting a wide net of influence and inspiration through their books, articles, training materials, and myriad church appearances. In doing so, they are reaching thousands with their message of stewardship for the earth. Their story reminds me of Jesus' first call to discipleship;<sup>xx</sup> through their conversion journeys and current outreach to others, they clearly set down their old ways to “fish for people” in a new way of spreading the Gospel news of God's love for the earth and the Christian responsibility to care for it.

The depth and breadth of the Sleeth's ministry is astonishing to me given their story. Less than 10 years ago, at the end of the 1990s, they were not engaged in religion at all and were only

scratching the surface of their environmental awareness. Today, after a complete transformation in their lifestyles, the family demonstrates ecological living in every facet of their lives. They have published numerous articles and three books<sup>xxi</sup> about their journey, including suggestions for others interested in living a more Christian-focused sustainable life. They see their religious and environmental commitments as interrelated and so their work weaves together sustainability themes with Biblical references and theological explanations. In addition to the books, Nancy and Matthew have started a nonprofit organization called *Blessed Earth* that frames their ministry and is the umbrella for the many ways they are reaching out to others. The organization's mission statement and project principles describe the focus of the Sleeth's work and also provide a mirror for their life journey to ecological enlightenment and a sustainable way of life (see Figure 1).

Earlier in this Chapter, I summarized theologian Marcus Borg's description of the conversion experience. Most are a "gradual and incremental process," he wrote, but also can be "sudden and dramatic" involving a "life-changing epiphany" or "dramatic revelation" that can be recalled, even years later, to the "day or even an hour when it happened" (Borg, 2003, p. 117). This type of experience characterizes the Sleeth's conversion to earth. At different times and in different ways, Matthew and Nancy both experienced "something like scales [falling] from [their] eyes" (Acts 9: 18). Their journeys are deeply interconnected, however; I was able to interview Nancy, but the published words of her husband also inform the profile.

**Figure 1. Mission and Principles of *Blessed Earth*, the Sleeth's Nonprofit Organization (taken from [www.blessedearth.org](http://www.blessedearth.org))**

**MISSION OF *BLESSED EARTH***

Blessed Earth is an educational nonprofit that inspires and equips faith communities to become better stewards of the earth. Through outreach to churches, campuses and media we build bridges that promote measurable environmental change and meaningful spiritual growth.

**PROJECT PRINCIPLES**

*Blessed Earth* is motivated by the biblical mandate to care for creation. We recognize that mountains, trees, oceans and wildlife are our inheritance and that they have meaning beyond merely supplying the raw material for human commerce. The earth exists to meet an unknown number of generations' needs. We must not destroy it to meet this generation's wants.

*Blessed Earth* promotes individual and group actions that conserve energy and care for the beauty of the world.

*Blessed Earth* builds bridges between people of different faith communities and those who work to solve environmental problems.

*Blessed Earth* believes that science without humanity leads to great harm, and that faith without works is dead.

*Blessed Earth* calls people to action. The time for talk has passed. It is our meaningful actions today that will determine the quality of life for future generations. *Blessed Earth* promotes measurable change.

*Blessed Earth* believes we are each morally responsible for the poorest among us. We recognize that those with the fewest resources are the most hurt by on-going destruction of the natural world. We who are given much are called to do more. To show true and meaningful love for our neighbors, we are called to give generously of our abundant resources.

## Origins and the Call

One week near the “turn of the millennium” Dr. Matthew Sleeth “admitted three different women to the hospital—all in their thirties, all with breast cancer, all destined to die” (Sleeth, N., 2009, p. xiii). One of these “seized uncontrollably, and Matthew could not stabilize her.” When he went out to the “waiting room [to] tell her husband, who had a toddler on one hip and a little girl holding his hand” that his wife had died, the seeds for a full conversion were planted. The experience of interacting with the young husband and father and the two children profoundly affected Matthew and he went home “visibly upset,” inquiring of his wife Nancy, “What are the odds?” (Sleeth, N., 2009, pp. xiii-xiv). Nancy named this moment as the defining start for their shared faith and environmental journeys:

We start the beginning of our faith journey with our environmental journey as a week at the hospital when Matthew saw three women who were all in their 30's, all of them had breast cancer, and all of them died.

After Matthew came home with the question, “What are the odds?” they started researching:

We looked them up [in a medical textbook] and when he started medicine, the odds were 1:19 a woman had a lifetime chance of getting breast cancer and at that point in time when he had the three women in the ER it was 1:9 and now, we've been telling people, it's 1:7, but an oncologist stopped us recently and said, “It's really closer to 1:6.”

With this startling discovery of the rapid increase in cancer rates they, “started discussing that maybe it is time to stop ‘running for the cure’ and to start looking for the cause.”

Not long after these events at the hospital, Nancy shared that the family went on vacation in Florida. There, one night after the children were in bed, she asked Matthew the “two questions that would change our lives forever” (Sleeth, N., 2009, p. xiv).

In response to the first question, “What do you think is the biggest problem facing the world today?” Matthew replied, “The world is dying.” He went on to explain:

There are no caribou in Caribou, Maine, no buffalo in Buffalo, NY, no elms on Elm Street, and no chestnuts on Chestnut Lane. And, years later now, that [statement] actually is not anecdotal because scientists are telling us that the amount of living matter on the earth is actually decreasing for the first time in recorded history (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008 and Sleeth, N., 2009).

Nancy then asked the question that would eventually propel them on a life-changing journey, “If the planet is dying, what are we going to do about it?” (Sleeth, N., 2009, p. xv). Matthew took a “few months” to discern a response and came back to Nancy with “the answer and it wasn’t one I really wanted to hear.” He said he was

going to quit his job and work full time for nothing until the problem was solved. And I said to him, “Are you sure you really want to do that much about it?” That is what we did.

The simple response to this question, “That is what we did,” masks the immensity of the change that would begin for the family. Nancy admitted in her book that:

The thought terrified me. My stomach turned inside out just thinking about what we might lose—our beautiful home, our harborside neighborhood, our vacations, not to mention health benefits and a retirement plan. . . . The selfish part of me began to whine: What about the three years of undergraduate school, four years of medical school, and three years of residency we had gone through together? . . . And then there were practical considerations: The kids were approaching their teen years. College was just around the corner. How would we possibly save enough money to pay for their education if our income dropped suddenly to zero? How, for that matter, would we put food on the table? Each of my arguments sounded logical on its own. In the material world, my husband’s sudden career change made no sense. Walking in faith may sound good in theory—when it happens to other people and everything turns out okay in the end—but I was terrified to take even the first step. What followed was a tense time, full of anxiety, fear of change, and conflicting desires. . . . The transition—as much emotional and spiritual as physical—took a couple of years (Sleeth, N., 2009, p. xvi, xvii).

During our interview, Nancy revealed another life event that may have opened her for the move to an exemplary “green” lifestyle despite the fear and challenges of making such a significant shift. While the family readily points to the events taking place in the hospital as their

starting point, Nancy also was faced with a life-changing loss when her brother drowned<sup>xxii</sup>—an event she eventually came to realize also was probably linked to changing environmental conditions:

My brother had drowned when he was 32 years old when we were all together on a family vacation. And, I did a tiny bit of research and it was kind of like, “Oh, duh,” I can’t believe I didn’t, I couldn’t face it . . . but this is just a revelation in the last few weeks. I believe my brother was a casualty of global warming, of climate change. In 1995, which is when he died, was the second worst hurricane season on record. And people died in Bermuda; my brother wasn’t the only one that died, but it kind of woke me up to the fact that people are losing their lives every day and when you talk about neighbor, yes, neighbor can be someone in our family, but it could be someone across the world, too.

Through these personal life crises and by bearing witness to others’ tragedies, *and then reflecting on the incidents*, the Sleeth’s came to understand at a core level a broadened sense of neighbor and the relationship of personal actions to environmental and social consequences. This broadened lens is explored more in Chapter 5; it is a characteristic shared by all of the role models.

Like some of the other role models, a crisis event became a “thin place” that triggered deep questions of meaning and opened them to deeper reflection and felt understanding of, connection to, and yearning for God, “the More,” and all beings (Borg, 2003). Depending on the context of the crisis, it may also contribute to a deeper knowledge of the human condition and the need for transformation:

What I realized is that was probably the first time in my life that I confronted, not evil, that is not the right word, but true loss, true sorrow, true pain. So that was part of the beginning of our spiritual journey, as well. We had some bad things happen in our lives—a few things in a row—and then you start to say, “Well, what is the meaning of life?” So, that was part of our faith journey, but I also realize looking back that it was probably part of my environmental journey, too, because it was the dramatic change in weather that contributed to my brother’s death.

Fowler (1995) suggests that this kind of life-changing event can shake up and “collapse” the framework of meaning that previously sustained the person experiencing the event (p. 194). Berry (1998) would call this kind of crisis event a potential “moment of grace.” Depending on how the person responds, the heart opening and introspection that often comes from tragedy can shift them to a more encompassing stage of faith and turn them toward a new way. Nancy attributes her brother’s death, which occurred a few years before their larger turn toward earth, as consciously contributing significantly to their faith journey and, perhaps, unconsciously to the larger environmental journey that was soon to begin.

### **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

*“Although I believed in the ‘environmental cause’ before I accepted Christ as my Savior, my belief did not translate into action” (Sleeth, M., 2008, p. 9).*

With Matthew’s decision to “quit his job and work for nothing until the problem was solved . . .” the family crossed a threshold to begin a journey that would touch every facet of their lives. Before, the Sleeths were living

a typical doctor’s American life. We had about a 3,000 square foot home on the coast of Maine one block from the water. It had a separate guest suite, it had a separate library. We had four sets of couches. We defined ourselves a lot by how we looked on the outside and by how our house looked on the outside. Matthew was raised in a lower . . . his dad was a fireman and there were five kids in the family and they even had grandparents living with them, so nine people in a three bedroom house and here we were four people in a four bedroom-plus house. We had way more than we needed. And, we did not have a mission in our life as a family; we did not have a shared mission. In some ways, we were all lost. We were plugging along, we were doing what we were supposed to do. The kids got good grades. It looked great on the outside. I taught part-time. Matthew was the family bread winner. We were living, quote, “the good life,” but it wasn’t a very happy life because there was no anchor. And we were really just drifting along.

They had “no spiritual anchor, no particular religious worldview” (Sleeth, M., 2008, p. I-18).

Nancy wrote that despite the fact they “were enjoying the good life and living out the American dream . . . something was missing.” The family “had all the *nice* things that were supposed to make us happy, yet at the core we still felt hollow” (Sleeth, N., 2009, p. xiii).

Nancy and Matthew had grown up with different faith perspectives and neither was actively practicing. Matthew described his Protestant upbringing as one that “hadn’t taken” and admitted that prior to his conversion he hadn’t “been inside a church in twenty-five years” other than for weddings or funerals. He “believed that good science and reasoning could resolve all of life’s problems” (Sleeth, M., 2008, p. I-18). Nancy was raised in a conservative Jewish family, but did not actively practice her faith after marriage. She said,

We kind of dealt with the religion issue by not dealing with it at all, so we like to say that our kids were so confused that they thought the fiddler on the roof slid down the chimney and laid an Easter egg . . . Basically, we didn’t deal with the religion issue.

Because they both intuitively believed that faith and environmentalism went together, the same time they began their journey to a more sustainable way of life, they also embarked on a faith journey. Together, Nancy and Matthew pursued deep spiritual and environmental questions. They read deeply from all of the wisdom traditions, including Hindu, Buddhist, and Hebrew sacred texts, as well as other sources (e.g., parts of the Koran, bits of the Book of Mormon, and listened to the Ramayana) (Sleeth, N., 2009). They also calculated their ecological footprint and were shocked to discover that even though they were comparable to the “average” American, they were “clearly using more than our fair share on a global scale: *six times* more energy than our neighbors around the world!” (Sleeth, N., 2009, p. xvii).

Despite this intensive search of the world’s wisdom, the pieces did not begin to fall into place until Matthew picked up a Bible on a slow night at the hospital. As he was reading it, the

answers to many questions began to fall into place. He brought the Bible home and intensified his review of it, especially with the lens of, “Should we care this much about this issue?”

And so he took an orange pencil—I wish to God it had been a green pencil, but he took an orange pencil—and he went through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation and he underlined everything that had anything to do with nature, with our stewardship of nature, how we are supposed to care for nature, and what he ended up with was an orange bible.

Matthew found his answers in the Bible and that prompted his deepening Christianity. He wrote,

I learned that the compelling truth of the Scriptures is not to be proven by archaeological, scientific, or theological theorems. The power of the Bible is most evident in its ability to change lives. It can transform a wealthy Italian playboy into a saint (Saint Francis of Assisi). By its amazing grace, it can transform a debauching, murderous slave trader into a humble abolitionist (John Newton). It can transfigure prostitutes into women of virtue, cowards into rocks of the church, and the proud into the meek (Sleeth, 2008, p. I-19).

At first, Nancy supported her husband in his journey, but a numinous encounter in nature changed everything for her. She had started attending church with her husband, “kind of just to humor him, being the good wife kind of thing” but had also started a personal Sabbath practice of “long walks up this mountain near our house.” She called it, “my time to talk with God.” One time, Nancy recounted, “I was coming down the mountain and I felt Jesus by my side—it was just one of those experiences, not explained, but I felt him breathing right next to me and he’s never left my side.”

The Sleeth’s ecological and religious conversions unfolded in tandem and “changed everything” about them.

Coming to faith in Christ changed everything about us. It changed the books that we read, it changed the art that we liked, it changed the movies that we watched, it changed our friends, and it changed our relationship with family. It’s not easy for someone who was raised Jewish to say that she’s Christian. . . . What we found is that the more we scaled back our material life, the more Christ-centered we became, the more joyful our lives became, as well. So we—well you lived in Bath, so you know that Maine is a big party kind of area—we didn’t participate in that anymore, so it separated us from our neighbors. It involved moving to a house the size of our old garage. It meant instead of

obsessing about the way our house looked and whether it could be photographed for *Better Homes and Gardens*, we started obsessing about how we could live a life closer to Jesus and I think the things that we cared about became much more real and much less self-centered and much more other-centered. So, it changed everything about our lives. When you stop watching television, that changes your life. When you stop being bombarded with messages about how you should look a certain way or how your house should look a certain way, or your kids should be a certain way; when you start ignoring all those messages by taking them out of your life as much as possible, and instead use the Bible as your guide, it changes everything about your life and your family's life.

The Sleeth's journey shifted from one of looking outward for the problem to one of looking inward. They model the three distinct stages of transformation Mitchell Thomashow highlighted in his book *Ecological Identity*. First, blaming the externalized other and then recognizing personal culpability: "If I am a member of the culture, and I contribute (unknowingly perhaps) to its actions, then I am also the perpetrator" (Thomashow, 1995, p. 155). The Sleeths moved beyond the potential "blame-guilt" loop into positive and productive actions for change. The transformation inherent in the third stage enables people to "take responsibility for their actions and move forward to change themselves and society" (Thomashow, 1995, p. 155). The Sleeths did this guided by the biblical imperative "judge not lest ye be judged" and set about aligning their actions with their values and demonstrating the new way:

I think the awakening was that we thought we were being good already and the awakening was really reading the Bible and finding out, "judge not lest ye be judged." We were always saying, "Well, if only the government would raise the CAFÉ standards so that the car companies would make cars that would make better mileage." It was always "them"—business, or government, or science that should be providing the answers and the awakening was that, "no." Ghandi is famous for the quote: "Be the change you wish to see in the world" and he in *His Experiments for Truth* credits that to reading Matthew, the Gospel of Matthew. And, it is just a paraphrasing of "take the log out of your own eye before you worry about the speck in somebody else's" so that is, I guess if you want to say, a kind of startling realization—it is not going to change unless we change first. Then, how do we play that out? That was a process, is a process, a continuing process.

Before contacting the Sleeths for an interview, I read Matthew's book (Nancy's was not yet in print) which documented in detail the actions they took as a family to live out their ecological conversion. Their extensive sustainability actions are too numerous to summarize, but cover all bases defined in the ecological footprint, recommended by Merkel (2003) and so many others, and suggested in the numerous religious and other calls for environmental responsibility. They developed their own *Serve God, Save the Planet Energy Audit* (Sleeth, M., 2006) that seemed even more rigorous than the standard ecological footprint quiz when I took it and scored myself. In listening to their story I still find it hard to imagine how they were able to downsize from their "doctor's" house to a dwelling the size of their former garage and cut their family of four's electric bill to "one-tenth the national average" (Sleeth, M., 2008, p. I-20). Before they started "teaching and preaching" to others, they felt it was imperative to "walk the talk" themselves:

And so we started working on that big 2x4 in our own eyes. Eventually, we got our electricity use down to one-tenth of the national average, our fossil fuel use we cut back by two-thirds, and our trash production by nine-tenths. After we got to that point, we thought it was okay to start writing and talking and preaching about the environment.

Perhaps even more inspiring is the extent of their outreach and their humbleness about their accomplishments embodying and promoting creation care. The following quote illustrates this and also hints at some of the ongoing struggles the two of them face—the struggle to avoid temptation in a consumerist world and the extensive travel schedule and workload:

Anybody can point their finger at us, as well. This is something we have to struggle with. Matthew has to travel a lot and we try to do it in the most environmentally responsible way that we can. Our justification is that, "This is a war and there are resources required to fight this war." And, if he can reach; he started reaching in the last couple of years tens of thousands and is moving toward reaching hundreds of thousands of people. As long as we continue to live our personal life that way [meaning ecologically sound], that's a decision we've become comfortable with. Our hope is to travel a lot less and to use media to communicate and that is the direction we are headed.

But to get started, to get the message out there, it was just absolutely required. He's been to more than 100-150 churches and campuses in the last year and that is not a life we enjoy, I promise. Matthew's been gone for basically a month now and neither of us like to travel and there's nothing glamorous—I've been on the road with him. But, it does require resources. So, people could point the finger at us and say, look, he's traveling all the time. So, I am the last person to point the finger at other people. But, we have seen many examples, because we stay in peoples' houses a lot, where environmentalists live very lush lives.

The temptation of our consumerist society is constantly at play, but their faith, partnership, and the fellowship of others keep them focused:

So I don't want to hold ourselves up, Matthew, me and our family, as better than other people at all. We struggle everyday with decisions. . . . [For example, they made a commitment to live in a walkable community, but] when the car is here, it is really easy just to jump into it, even when [the destination] is just a half mile. You know, it is still a temptation. We all have temptations everyday. I credit our "success," the power to be able to resist the many temptations that come our way, or some of them, to God. There is no way we would be doing this without God. And that's the whole motivation and if we need strength, we return to the Word. We pray with each other, we pray with friends. I just think it is human nature to be selfish; we look after ourselves. The only thing that gets us out of our selfish ways is a belief in something bigger than ourselves and for us, that is God and for us, the way that we love God on a daily basis is to love our neighbors. Again, coming back to one of the most important ways that we can do that is to care for creation.

Nancy and Matthew work and pray as a partnership and demonstrate the importance of others in supporting the journey. As Chapter 5 illuminates, the Sleeths, like so many of the role models, discovered "we can't do it alone." They are supported first through their faith in God, and then by their partnership, family, and community; that is what sustains them when they are reaching out to so many others about how to sustain the planet:

We came here a year and a half ago [commenting on a move from New Hampshire to Kentucky where they now live] and we didn't know anybody and we now have so many brothers and sisters and so many invitations all the time to do things. We have so many people praying for us. We are overwhelmed by brotherhood and everywhere we go we feel like we have friends. When you live the average American lifestyle, it separates you from people, but the life of Jesus is the life of community. That's a whole other huge area of the journey is bringing you into community with others. Because if you have lived the typical American life, you don't borrow things; you are independent. When you don't borrow things, then people don't borrow things from you, and so everybody ends up

having all their own tools, and their own pick up truck because of the three times per year they need to use it and the list just goes on and on and on. And, it is the exact opposite in our lives now. People are constantly borrowing things from us and we are constantly borrowing things from them, because they are not ours. None of it is ours. So it is a complete conversion experience. The deeper you go, the less you care about what is yours and the more you care about . . . well, you know it belongs to God.

Nancy sees “the environmental conversion part of it as the way I act out the spiritual conversion in a real and tangible way every day of my life. It is my way of showing my love for the Lord and showing my love of my neighbors.” The two questions that prompted the Sleeth’s environmental and spiritual conversion roughly 10 years ago have transformed into two new questions that guide them forward: “Does this bring me closer to God? And, does this help me love my neighbor?” (Sleeth, N., 2009, p. xix).

### **Gail Worcelo**

When I started searching the literature and consulting with others about role models for my research, Sister Gail Worcelo and the Green Mountain Monastery were mentioned repeatedly. Through the co-founding of Green Mountain Monastery, an “Ecozoic Monastery” for the twenty-first century, Gail is answering Father Thomas Berry’s “invitation” to establish a “women’s religious congregation committed to the saving of the natural world” (Worcelo, 2000).

Gail’s journey of ecological enlightenment and sustainability is one that has deepened in commitment and widened in reach throughout the course of her life. Integral to her journey has been the alignment of her heart and head with embodied action. In many ways, the evolution of Green Mountain Monastery tracks with her personal journey and is a mirror of it. As described in their mission statement, the Monastery endeavors to bring the ancient monastic tradition into its “cosmological/planetary phase” by “understanding ourselves within the larger context of the

Universe Story and by celebrating Earth as a Single Sacred Community” (Green Mountain Monastery, 2008). Similarly, Gail remains deeply connected to her monastic roots, is influenced greatly by previous founders and foundresses, while seeking to “reinhabit the spiritual landscape of our Catholic Monastic Tradition” (Worcelo, n.d.). Central to the mission of Green Mountain Monastery, and Gail’s personal life, is commitment to the “ancient monastic values of prayer, community, simplicity, hospitality, stability, silence, scholarship, sustainable farming, manual labor, and the cultivation of the arts” (Green Mountain Monastery, 2008). These values support the Monastery’s “serious commitment to the transformation of consciousness” that is vital for ecological enlightenment and commitment to a sustainable way of life:

Through serious commitment to the transformation of consciousness, we take on those conditions that are destructive to life on Earth beginning with those same conditions present within ourselves that cause us to diminish and destroy the sacred community of life (Green Mountain Monastery, 2008).

This statement weaves together recognition of the vital interconnection, indeed union, of “inner and outer” that is the core of Gail’s understanding and ethic. Because of Gail’s life experiences, she embodies the “thin place” where the veil between the worlds “becomes very soft, porous, permeable” and the “material layer of reality all around us . . . and the encompassing Spirit in which everything is . . . meet or intersect” (Borg, 2003, pp. 155-156). From this perspective Gail’s journey is interwoven with the Monastery’s and both exist within a numinous “Field” to which they surrender and that “calls [them] forward”:

This new community and the monastery itself, which is bigger than the sum of its parts, wants to be aligned with itself and not inconsistent at any of its levels and so it is probably a mirror of myself and Bernadette [Bostwick, the other co-founder]. It’s probably a mirror, but it’s more than that because it has a life of its own, as well, that calls us forward, too; to not impose ourselves on it, not impose our form on it. [There is] the need to be open to what is arising here and what it wants for itself.

Gail views the call to sustainable living, the call to embody the Ecozoic Era, as a response to the emerging Universe Story reflected in religious communities. In the earlier traditions, she noted in our interview, “the role of women religious was to work principally with the human community. Today, we understand that there is no human community in any way separate from the larger community of life that supports us and of which we are a part.”

This commitment to the inseparable larger community is clear in all aspects of Gail’s life and is well documented although some of the experiential aspects (e.g., the felt sense of mystical connection) are challenging to capture in words. Long before meeting her, I vicariously experienced Gail and the Green Mountain Monastery by reading detailed descriptions of her work in two books I consulted extensively for my research. *Sustainability and Spirituality* by John Carroll (2004) and *Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology* by Sarah McFarland Taylor (2007) presented case studies and historical overviews of the emerging ecological movement among Catholic religious. In particular, Taylor (2007) provided detailed information on the Green Mountain Monastery and the underlying philosophies of Sisters Gail and Bernadette. Gail also wrote several background papers that framed her vision for the monastery (Worcelo, 2000 and G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008) and the Monastery web site provides additional information. I reviewed all of these sources to prepare for my meeting with Gail.

Gail and I first met briefly at the *Renewing Hope* conference at Yale Divinity School in February 2008 and a few weeks later we met at the Brattleboro Food Co-op for the interview. Since then, I have visited the Monastery on several occasions.

To visit the Monastery, located at the end of a long dirt road up in Vermont’s Northeast Kingdom, is to enter a sanctuary space where the natural and built environment are seamlessly integrated as a coherent model of sustainable religious life. The road to the Monastery passes

through open fields and woodlands that are now preserved in a land trust. Near the end of the road and close to the Monastery entrance is a large organic vegetable garden. These Sisters are committed vegetarians and grow much of their food; I even experienced a homemade dandelion communion wine on one visit.

Entering the Monastery deepens the experience. The main structure is a traditional New England cape with attached barn that now serves as a meeting space for programs and prayer. Both buildings were “green” renovated and are now well insulated, passive and active solar structures. The main spaces are open and free of clutter. The furniture emphasizes quality over quantity and is mostly handcrafted of local materials and by local artisans (e.g., a handmade butternut table and bench for dining, an oak burl table, and book shelves crafted from split trees). The Sisters write on their web site that “Simplicity and the dignity of objects in our space are essential elements of our Monastic Aesthetic.” Gail emphasized this ethic during our interview:

As far as material goods, we keep a simplicity of lifestyle. We are also conscious of an aesthetic, or creating a space that is not cluttered and that people can come into and feel freedom of self. We are conscious of structuring space and putting things into the space that have integrity about them and not taking everything in that people may want to give us. We have to stand our ground a lot of time and say, “no” we just can’t use this in the Monastery, we don’t want this, we don’t want to be accumulating all this kind of stuff. That is a hard thing to do.

As a visitor to the Monastery, I can attest to their success in achieving this aesthetic—the monastery exemplifies “Shaker” simplicity, but is warm and inviting. The thick walls create a solid and very quiet environment conducive to introspection and reflection. Objects in the Monastery are carefully selected and their form and function integrate to contribute to the overall mission of the place. Most of the items can be linked to the land and some help tell the Universe Story which the Monastery honors. For example, a central feature of the Monastery is a huge Russian (masonry) fireplace that provides most of the heat. The thermal mass of these wood

burning fireplaces absorb and radiate heat for hours. Theirs is made of mostly local stone interspersed with intriguing fossils. Its function is to provide heat, while in form it is “living art.”

It also tells a story because embedded in its stone body is the geological history of Vermont from the Pre-Cambrian Era to the Present. As we sit upon the soapstone bench we recall the intense heat which forged it and the journey of these stones through molten magma, lava flow, pressure and intense conditions (Green Mountain Monastery, 2008).

Gail concluded an article about the Ecozoic Green Mountain Monastery with these words that speak so clearly of her beliefs and vision:

When we humans realize that our ancestry includes all forms of life, all the stars, the galaxies, even the fireball at the heart of time, then a spring of power will renew the face of the Earth (Worcelo, 2000).

Recognizing and honoring this extended family tree is evident throughout the monastery and reflected in the actions and words of its co-founder. When we look back in her life we see that these seeds of connection and understanding were sown much earlier.

## **Origins**

When Gail was six years old, living in Brooklyn, New York, she had an extraordinary numinous encounter, what many would call mystical, where she experienced “the unity of all reality.” She remembers the moment vividly even years later as an adult (she was 48 at the time of our interview) and considers it fundamental to her journey. She recounted it during our interview as the moment her spiritual and sustainability journey seeds were planted:

When I look back, the first main experience that I had was at the age of six. I’ll tell you the incident and I couldn’t articulate it that way at the age of six, but it’s really what happened. One day my mother set me to take a nap and I was lying in bed and I was asking the question, “What does it mean to be me?” So my six-year old head was going—“What am I?”—and just pushing the question. And I remember being unrelenting with it and all of the sudden I had this experience of the veil being ripped asunder and I had an absolute experience of the unity of all reality. Certainly as a six-year old I couldn’t

describe or explain it as such, but I can access that moment, to this day, so many years later. It was fundamental. So from an early age, I had a sense of, “There is no separation,” so that carried through.

The awareness of being in communion with all beings is something that defines Gail; in my interview and in my interactions with her since then, I experience her as someone who has transcended (for the most part) the sense of separation and dualistic mind characteristic of Western civilization. She was not able to articulate the significance of her six-year old experience when it happened, but it is one that stayed with her and has informed her life since. She comments that it may have gone dormant for awhile right after it happened, like a seed in the ground waiting for the right conditions to grow. These conditions arrived in the form of Father Thomas Berry:

[The six-year old experience] didn’t disappear, but meeting Thomas Berry I think brought it up from . . . maybe it was more in a dormant state. I know it never left completely because I could see it as I follow my trajectory in terms of my relationship with animals and people of color and different aspects of the differentiated array of humans and plants and that kind of thing. It didn’t leave, but when I met Thomas Berry it was an integrative period of my life because it felt like the head and the heart of myself came together, so that was a moment of integration.

## **The Call**

Gail met Thomas Berry in 1984, when he was starting to expand his writing and teaching on the Universe Story and she was beginning her time as a Novitiate with St. Gabriel’s Monastery in Pennsylvania. She marks this moment as the one where she heard the call to step up her actions toward a more ecologically aware and sustainable life:

The next big event was when I was in the Novitiate of my monastery with the Passionists. They brought Thomas Berry in for classes and hearing this man tell the Story of the Universe and relating it to the tradition and to religious life, specifically saying the religious life of the future and the tradition as it goes into the future has to contextualize itself within this larger context and to hear the context just broke open myself at the level

of the mind. So the six-year old experience broke open myself at the level of the heart and that [referencing the teaching of Thomas Berry] was a major experience that broke open myself at the level of the mind.

Thomas Berry's words "broke open" in Gail in a way that did not seize others in her community. His teachings brought together the heart experience she had as a child with her mind as she learned the context from him. When these two came together, she was opened to a third possibility—how to embody this new way. In reflecting on her journey, Gail wrote:

In 1994 I read a paper by Thomas Berry entitled, "Women Religious: Their Future Role." It stated that in past centuries no religious community had been founded that was oriented toward protection of the Earth from the devastation that was beginning to be inflicted on the natural world through human agency. Such a community would have been unthinkable at that time. Now, however, there is hardly any religious or human activity that has prior claim to our concern. If a women's religious congregation committed to the saving of the natural world was unthinkable in former centuries, it is now unthinkable that such a community does not exist! (Worcelo, 2000).

This invitation and challenge "came as call and imperative" to Gail. It did not affect others in the same way and Gail is not entirely sure why the call registered deeply for her. She suggests she might have been "jump started" by her prior numinous experience, but she ultimately cannot say why. Perhaps "grace?" Nonetheless, the call stuck and circumstances unfolded such that Gail was able to listen deeply and respond by crossing the threshold toward a new way.

### **Threshold and Unfolding Journey**

Gail says that her "heart and head" experiences were "concretized in the flesh" through founding the Green Mountain Monastery. She did not arrive at the crossroads from a place of sudden epiphany, but rather over a period of time when it became:

increasingly more difficult to integrate into the community all this stuff that I was learning from Thomas. For a period of time it was okay to straddle, but it was always a straddling because the total community couldn't [embrace the call to the Ecozoic Era]. I always say, there was an imaginary shelf in the monastery. On this side was

biodegradable products and on this other side was Tide, on this side was organic peanut butter and on this side it was Skippy, on this side I was growing food for the community and yet some of the Sisters still had to eat iceberg lettuce shipped from thousands of miles away. So that line followed not only in the physical aspects of the shelf, but the shelf went down; it went deeper, into our philosophies and God images and God language and liturgy and how we celebrated. It went into ritual, how people took retreats. So, the divide was constantly there and I was constantly, you know, having to straddle it; to try to bring them in and yet knowing we could go so much further and also knowing, “I don’t want to fight.” For a time it was okay, but after awhile I thought, “No, this has to soar.” We don’t have that much time and Thomas kept impressing [how] we need to move into the Ecozoic and we don’t have that much time. So I would ask myself . . . I have to give my life to the forward momentum of the evolutionary process. I did enough of the straddling and I contributed enough, too, to that place [Note: referencing the monastery in Pennsylvania where she started].

As Gail’s journey to straddle two worlds became increasingly difficult, an opportunity to explore alternative ways emerged in 1998 when the larger community began having facilitated meetings about their future. The whole community was exploring questions like, “Where are we going? What are we doing? Let’s look at our issues.” just as Gail was asking the same questions of herself. Through the personal and community discernment process, Gail was able to explore “potential probabilities and possibilities.” She submitted a proposal asking the question, “Would you be willing to mission me to found a whole new monastery based on the work of Thomas Berry and this new thinking?” After processing the proposal with a facilitator, St. Gabriel’s community said “yes.”

Also in 1998, Gail affirmed her call to found a new monastery by completing a vision quest in the Utah Canyonlands. She wanted intentional solo time in the desert “to clarify what [she] was feeling inside about this new community.” The focus of her vision quest was the question, “How am I to serve the world and what’s my gift?” The experience of this extended time on the land, water-only fast, solo time, and direct experience of nature “confirmed to keep going in this and begin the new founding.”

Her community agreed and the vision quest confirmed, so Gail literally crossed the threshold away from St. Gabriel's Monastery and Scranton, Pennsylvania on a journey through the uncharted terrain of establishing a new ecologically oriented monastic community in the tradition of Thomas Berry. She left with no clear destination, but on a search to find a place to embody the vision. Human and non-human allies and guides have supported her along the way. She has been guided by her long-time teacher, mentor, and friend, Thomas Berry, from the start. Sister Bernadette Bostwick also joined her from the outset and is an instrumental partner in the endeavor. Her Passionist Tradition also guides and inspires her and the Benedictine Tradition roots the vision.

Gail also feels supported by the historical role models from the broad spectrum of monastic life. On a wall in the kitchen of the monastery are photographs and other images of monastic founders and other religious inspirations. With his teaching and broad historical perspective, Berry helped her contextualize the founding of the Monastery as part of an evolving lineage of monastic forms. He identified numerous "moments of grace" where new monastic forms were developed and helped Gail to see her role in co-creating the next moment. Berry provided "the history of the tradition and [identified] those major moments, those moments of grace, in the tradition itself:"

We started with the Celtic influence and the influence of the desert mothers and fathers, moving to Benedict and Scholastica to Dominic, to Catherine, Clair, and Francis, to Ignatius, to Vincent DePaul, to Teilhard. What Thomas was essentially saying to us was, "There has never been a community founded to meet the needs of the human community and to preserve and care for life systems of the planet." That would have been unheard of in former times. But in our time it would be unheard of that such a one or many of such does not exist within the tradition and that the tradition itself doesn't move into this new moment of grace which I just call the cosmologic or planetary phase. But it is a whole new moment in the history of the tradition as it is in the world. [Thomas] would say to us, "you're in alignment in this family; you're not some fringe

group going out to start something that is not in alignment with how the tradition has unfolded over the course of its 2000 year history.

Gail embraces all of these traditional perspectives as providing solid ground for the emerging Monastery, while responding to the “Spirit’s . . . call to carry the elements of these traditions forward in a new expression” (Green Mountain Monastery, 2008). After several twists and turns in the road of an amazing journey that formally started in 1998, although the seeds were planted much earlier, the formal Dedication and Blessing of Green Mountain Monastery in Greensboro, Vermont occurred on October 13, 2007.

A detailed description of monastery’s unfolding journey, which parallels in many ways Gail’s unfolding journey, was provided in Taylor (2007; see especially the chapter entitled “Engaged Monasticism in the Ecozoic Era”). The founding has not always been smooth, and Gail and Bernadette have many stories to tell. Sometimes when I am listening I imagine Parsifal on his quest for the grail. Like other journeyers on a spiritual quest, Gail and Bernadette encountered times of trial. And yet a strong guiding faith propels them forward:

So after we were missioned to begin the new monastery, we landed in the town of Weston, Vermont, with the [Benedictine] monks of Weston and began a search for land. We had no money and we were like, “Okay, how are we going to do this?” We finally found land in central Vermont and there was a whole long story; but we found land, so we purchased it, and it was near 200 acres of land with no buildings on it, and we thought we’d build a Green Monastery. But there was a right of way going through it and there was someone in the back who the realtor told us was a recluse but it turned out he co-owned the land with other family members and it turned out that there were lots of twenty-something year olds going through and drinking and a lot of them were on drugs and having parties back there. So for those reasons and others, shortly after we purchased it, I knew it wasn’t the right place. So we ended up doing another vision quest on the land with the question, “Is this the right place?” Bernadette, the Sister I live with, thought this was the right place and I absolutely thought it wasn’t. Shortly after I purchased it, I had a deep insight, “This is not it.” And we couldn’t reconcile and I was thinking, “I don’t know if I’m right here, so let’s . . .” This was like a year later. So we stayed 12 days and nights on the land, in tents, with other people joining us with the question. [At the end] we gathered in a yurt that we had on the property and [a facilitator] led the discernment—what happened on the land? And, every single person, including

Bernadette, who didn't think we should leave, said, "This is not the place." So here the land again, the natural world, the universe, and indications of many kinds revealed that to all of us.

The Sisters ended up selling the land they had owned for less than two years and moved on in their quest for the right location. Through a series of fortuitous events—sometimes when I hear of Gail and Bernadette's founding stories I am reminded of Joseph Campbell's account of the role of "Supernatural aid (the unsuspected assistance that comes to one who has undertaken [her] proper adventure)" in the heroine's journey (Campbell, 1973, p. 36)—they discovered their current location in Greensboro, Vermont, an auspicious location they feel, since their mentor Thomas Berry is from and currently lives in Greensboro, North Carolina.

Starting with a numinous encounter at a very young age and emerging through time with the help of allies, mentors, and guides, Gail's journey of ecological enlightenment and commitment to sustainability became embodied through the hands-on founding of the new Monastery. Her journey has been blessed with profound moments of grace and also times of trial. Gail has a deep spiritual life with many forms of practice. Through her extensive and ongoing spiritual formation, what she calls "development of the interior," Gail has learned how "to be a vehicle for the action to happen." Gail wrote that "The deeper within I go in prayer, the farther I move out into the cosmos. Inner and outer become one" (Worcelo, 2005). These qualities of mystical consciousness are explored more in Chapter 5, but they are what enable Gail to feel and know intuitively, "The monastery I am is the vastness of the universe itself" (Worcelo, 2005).

During our interview I experienced this mystical quality and "presence" of Gail in a way I have with few others. While it is difficult to describe in words, I will say that even though we were conducting the interview in the busy, loud, and often chaotic Brattleboro Co-op Café, I felt

transported to a different place and time—the noise fell away, distraction ceased, and it felt like time stood still. It did not, of course, and both of us were shocked when we finally looked up to see that three and one-half hours had passed! I share this vignette only to indicate that I experienced directly Gail’s charisma, unitive energy, sense of no separation, openness to the More (Universe and Divine), and her presence as vehicle for numinous action. The experience I had with Gail during the interview is what Borg identifies as occurring when people “become thin places . . . through whom we experienced the presence of the Spirit at particular junctures in our lives” (2003, p. 156). It does not surprise me that she has often experienced moments of grace on her unfolding journey.

The journey of founding a new order and living fully into a mutually enhancing and sustainable way of life is a difficult path for anyone, however, no matter how enlightened they are of the Ecozoic way. In our interview and subsequent visits, as well as in her conversation with Sarah Taylor (2007), Gail mentioned struggles and moments of doubt. They seem primarily to occur in moments of occasional loneliness, with challenges of balancing a monastic rhythm with the day-to-day concerns of the world, through misunderstandings and limited perspectives from the institutional church, and internal shadow and self-doubt.

Taylor (2007) enumerated the difficulties of balancing monasticism with engagement in the world: “figuring out the appropriate ratio of engagement in the broader culture to distance from that same culture is a complex calculation” (p. 124). The monastery is “on the edge” intentionally; “But even the idyllically situated Green Mountain monastery is embedded in the struggles of community—local and global, human and nonhuman” (p. 129). Gail and Bernadette must continually discern their level of engagement, a situation that is heightened because they also are a self-sufficient monastery since they left their founding order. Their questions about

engagement also range to how many outside teaching and speaking engagements they will take on. Gail is a popular and in-demand retreat leader for programs around the country and world. This helps to financially support their monastery and mission, but points to extensive travel as the area where she feels least sustainable. Also, it makes it more difficult to maintain their monastic commitments of stable connection to a place, which also affects their ability to recruit new members.

Gail expressed to me that,

It would have been easier if we'd had a mentoring community within the tradition [so that] when people are doing things out there, on a limb, at risk, putting themselves out there for other groups who can't do that but who support that, to step out and be able to say "We're a home for you back here or tell us your story and we're with you" . . . more officially, like consciously. [And, to have them say] "We'll take a stand, too, by saying publicly, and however way, that we support you and we hold you as a mentee."

This yearning for a mentoring community hints at the loneliness and doubt Gail sometimes feels. She and Bernadette are just two people trying to found a new monastic form at a time when religious life is dramatically changing. While they are blessed with over 100 Companions (these are essentially "friends" of the monastery who provide prayer, nominal financial, and volunteer support), the two sisters are involved in maintaining and growing the monastery. Their tasks include growing much of their own food, keeping up and improving the buildings and grounds, traveling extensively as retreat leaders/teachers/speakers, developing a small cottage industry, hosting numerous guests to the monastery, recruiting new members and spreading the word about their endeavor, in addition to their daily commitment to prayer and meditation—it is a formidable load. They joke that the order is founded on "*ora et labora*" (prayer and work), but that it is really "*ora et labora, labora, labora....*"

The aloneness and fear is sensed not only in the extent of the work load, but also in the ways leaders sometimes feel when they are out in front, forging new ground, exposed, and all alone. At times they wonder if anyone is following, will anybody come:

Sometimes it feels like whoa—we're really out here in more ways than one—we are in the North Pole up there and it's scary, too, in the sense of—for me, myself, I am a total community person. I thrive in community because I love the interaction of people and ideas and even conflict and prayer together. For prayer in the monastic tradition, you need more than two. You really need a community to . . . So I lived in that for many, many years. But these last several years of founding, it's not there and I, myself, really miss that. And then it's like, what are we doing at a time when women are not coming into religious communities? Is the religious community an aberration now? Is it going extinct? Is it a dying species? And here we are rising up to start this new thing... whoa. Wait, wait, wait. Those are some of the big things/fears that I have. Like, what are we doing? Is this ever going to grow? It's not in our hands. Up to this point I've had control—we're going to do this, find the land, raise the money. These are the things that we could maneuver, but right now it's like open hands, like okay.

When these moments of doubt arise, Gail returns to her spiritual practice and calls upon her faith and her capacity to surrender expectation and trust the emerging way. Showing her fully human side, Gail also admitted that, “it would be nice, something comforting, if I had this other community somewhere where I could run to, that would support you, hold you up.”

Gail's extensive studies in psychology, spirituality and the human condition also help her recognize and attend to the other challenge she encounters on her sustainability journey. Joseph Campbell (1973) warns that the heroine's journey involves encounters with monsters and demons, most of which are internal. Gail attends to these through a practice of “recognizing and releasing.” When she recognizes the “old mind” (i.e., “false self, egoic self”) she works to

just let it go. And to me, it's not that easy. I just had an experience of it at the [*Renewing Hope*] conference and I could see it in myself, the shadow coming out in me because there was this felt sense in me of “Oh my gosh, I'm in the midst of all these academics, these Ph.D. people” and the shadow part of myself was doing a number on me like saying, “You have nothing to say; you are not schooled.” I mean, I have two Master's Degrees and I've been studying with Thomas forever, but it was the shadow self giving these messages: “What you have to say is inadequate, these people have studied longer,

there is nothing for you to say,” and I found within myself a pulling back and I thought, “Oh my gosh, all this stuff that happens when the shadow arises.” And I had to consciously—I think I did it a million times—[release]. It wasn’t like recognize and walk away. It was this constant effort. I physically at the conference was saying “keep letting go” and be open to see what happens, but keep letting go. But the pull into that other area is strong.

The other area that sometimes poses a challenge is in relationship with the larger institution of the Catholic Church. For the most part they stay below the radar screen and have church approval to begin this new monastic form. On the other hand, they occasionally run into barriers at the level of the hierarchy around:

The whole thing. [Them] not understanding it. [Asking] What is this about? Worldviews that are totally different, like women belong teaching in the classroom, in school, NOT doing this kind of thing. And whatever the other has envisioned—or worldview of what an environmentalist is, or someone connected with the earth—the negative concepts and barriers of negative impressions—treehuggers. That whole array. So we have come across all of that.

What sustains them? The “tremendous opportunity to contribute to the unfolding of the Universe.” Gail sees the Monastery as the coming together of her heart, which was opened as a child, her head which was awakened through Thomas Berry’s teaching, and her body through the work of co-founding. She recognizes and is inspired by her place in a lineage of foundresses and other influences from the religious tradition and she sees her place in, and as one with, the unfolding universe. Her belief in her tradition and in the Universe Story propel her forward

into, “What’s the next thing?” because evolution keeps going. So, it seems to me that unfolding into new consciousness, awakening into further consciousness with others is not just a personal thing, but one is on the journey with the rest of the human community or the immediate people who come into the path like right now [referencing me, the interviewer].

Gail describes her awakening from the “Old Story,” to an embodied commitment to the “New Story” as a “leap in consciousness” that takes her from the sense of the individual into a

felt experience of the whole. The “leap” involves integrating vertical alignment with a horizontal reach, not just within her but also in the monastery which she is:

To have that vertical alignment—head, heart, body—is the manifestation in materiality and the horizontal [is] that we are all in this Field and we need to become the perceptive ears and heart of that and let it move through us, so it feels like there are two things going on. And so that would affect response to the environmental crisis because it would ... the thing underneath the horizontal aspect is like a leap in consciousness. It is beyond those Sisters sitting one on one [in front of the blessed sacrament in prayer thinking] I am on this journey. No, no, it's not that. We are in the net, in the field, with all of reality and for me as it intensifies, then encounters intensify as well; not just with another human, but to have interior to interior meetings with the natural world as well, so that opens you up to the whole. You know, the past was like interreligious dialogue... from ecumenical to interreligious. The whole thing of interreligious dialogue—it's the experience of crossing over and then coming back and I think now we are up to interspecies and can we cross over and come back... and being able to be those vehicles in the field and explore what that means to cross over and then come back because then you are changed.

Gail is someone with the ability to cross over and come back. In doing so, she returns with the gifts of vision for a new way and the visceral experience of communion with the Whole.

## **SUMMARY**

Psychologists and other students of human development suggest that many, perhaps most, people turn away when they hear the call, or reach the threshold, to a new way of life (Fowler, 1995; Plotkin, 2008). These role models did not turn back. Most of them, through spiritual practice and discernment, sought the call. Even if it came unbidden, all of the role models responded once they heard. Each role model had different starting points, yet some common threads emerged about role model origins and journeys leading up to the call and decision to follow a more sustainable way. Each was somehow prepared for their unique “moment of readiness” to respond. Before turning to the unique perspectives and pathways of

these Christian role models in Chapter 5, it is helpful to reflect briefly on some of the factors that prepared them for their threshold moments.

Many of the following themes emerged from my research analysis as factors preparing the way for each role model's "moment of readiness" to say "yes" when they heard the deeper call:

### **Experiences in Childhood and Youth**

- Free and Safe Nature Exploration
  - Wandering, Exploring, Playing, Imagining
  - Nature Study
  - Exposure to Farming and Gardening
  - Exposure to Animals
  - Participating in Ecological Restoration Projects
- Early and Remembered Numinous Encounter
- Influential Teachers, Mentors, and Other Adults
- Family and/or Community Tradition and Influence

### **Experiences in Adulthood**

- Participating in Service/Mission Trips
- Learning Ecology and/or Earth Literacy (i.e., Universe Story/New Cosmology)
- Reconnecting with Earth/Nature as an adult (Quality time in nature)
- Numinous Encounter as Adult
- Responding to/Experiencing Loss
  - "Forced introspection" that comes from personal loss (e.g., grief, illness)
  - Witnessing loss of precious landscapes and ecological resources
- The Importance of Others
  - Mentors and Mentoring Environments
  - Supportive Community
  - Partners

- **Embodying an ethic:** Making the idea real through developing a new community, ecological learning center, and/or teaching others. It seems the outreach to others deepens the commitment in these role models so their words to the world are consistent with their day-to-day lives.

Many of these themes are similar to what other researchers have found about people who turn to the earth and/or step out as inspired community leaders, role models, and cultural creatives in other realms. These are relatively well documented (e.g., Daloz et. al., 1996; Dowdall, 1998; Gould, 1997 and 1999; Ray and Anderson, 2000; Schauffler, 2003; Scherch, 1997; Vickers, 2003) and are not the focus of my dissertation. A brief literature review of key findings from some these studies illuminates these threads for my research participants.

In a narrative study of the works from six ecological writers (including one interview with author Terry Tempest Williams), Marina Schauffler (2003) developed a preliminary model of their ecological conversions, noting six recurrent themes: remembrance, reflection, revelation, reciprocity, resistance, ritual:

- **Remembrance:** strong connection to the natural world as children, presence of a mentor to support their nature and other interests, and inspiration from the words and lives of other nature writers.
- **Reflection:** periods of “enforced introspection” that led the authors to “reassess their place in the ecological whole.” Schauffler notes that, “Psychic transformation can occur not only in response to deliberate immersion in natural settings but to experiences of loss, illness, estrangement, or despair.”
- **Revelation:** experience of moments that provided “profound glimpses into a larger mystery” and insight that renewed and reconstituted their lives.
- **Reciprocity:** deliberate and conscious efforts to “strengthen their identification with other members of the ecological community,” especially empathic relation to the more-than-human world.
- **Resistance:** conversion leads to activism; because of their deep affinity to the natural world, these converts “devote themselves to responsible action on its behalf.”

- Ritual: illustrates the importance of “creative and ritual arts” in supporting the conversion process (pp. 21-22).

Each of the authors she studied shared a strong connection to the natural world as children, had periods of “enforced introspection,” experienced moments that connected them to the “larger mystery,” consciously tried to strengthen their connection with the more-than-human world, became activist in their perspectives, and developed supporting rituals (Schauffler, 2003, pp. 21-22). None of Schauffler’s research subjects self-identified as actively religious, but personal spirituality played a role in each conversion. Schauffler’s framework captured many of the experiences that shaped/prepared role models for their threshold moment, but downplayed the role of faith (a topic that is explored in greater detail in Chapter 5).

Two additional studies examining peoples’ transformation toward more sustainable lives also discovered some of the themes illuminated by Schauffler and provided methodological insights for my work since both incorporated interviews and grounded theory analysis. Like Schauffler’s study, neither deeply mined the relationship of spirituality and/or religion to the transformation, but one noted that it played a role.

Focusing on adults living in the East Tennessee and Southern Appalachian bioregion, Scherch (1997) primarily explored how people were implementing their sustainable lives and considered the personal pathways that drew his research participants to sustainable choices. Many pathways influenced their choices and Scherch (1997) concluded that “learning to live and work more sustainably seems to be a personal evolutionary process of experience, knowledge-building, and integration, involving changes in behavior and awareness along the way” (p. 190). Like Schauffler’s research subjects, Scherch discovered that childhood memories in nature coupled with the mentoring influences of families, friends, or teachers played an important role.

Early environmental awareness and a “resistant,” activist perspective also influenced their decisions. Formal religion was not important, but spirituality was, and many of Scherch’s research participants “sought and participated in alternative religious practices, seeking spiritual connections directly with nature” (Scherch, 1997, p. 186). Domestic and international travel also was eye-opening and transformative for many of these people.

Families practicing sustainability (Judkins, 2004) were drawn to it for reasons similar to those uncovered by Schauffler (2003) and Scherch (1997), although greater emphasis was placed on themes of relationship. The primary factors motivating sustainability in the 12 couples included in Judkins’ study included: concern for the environment, “good health for family members, higher quality family relationships, and being part of a community” (Judkins, 2004, p. v). One or both of the partners in each couple included in the study brought a pro-environment worldview into the relationship and both were very concerned with fostering their children’s ecological awareness. Judkins did not explore the question of religion or spirituality.

In an extensive literature review, Gardner and Stern (2002) note limitations of the available literature, but found evidence of the importance of spirituality on “environmentalism.” Results suggest that religious fundamentalism may lead to “anti-environmental implications,” but that religiosity (measured by the strength of religious practice such as frequency of praying and self-reported strength of affiliation) may have a positive effect on “environmentalism” (Gardner and Stern, 2002, p. 43). In a study of values, Stern et al. (1999) found evidence of a link between “self-transcendent” values<sup>xxiii</sup> (as reported in Gardner and Stern, 2002, p. 68) and a person’s willingness to take on more pro-environmental actions. Brinkerhoff and Jacob (1987 and 1999) also found a potential relationship between “quasi-religious practices such as mindfulness” and “ecologically sustainable frames of mind” (p. 524).

## **Moments of Readiness**

As mentioned, many might hear the call but few respond. Many of the experiences just described prepare the ground for potential sustainability seeds to take hold and grow, but just like in my fickle vegetable garden there is a measure of Mystery combined with preparation and effort that collaborate to determine which will thrive. These experiences prepared the ground, but not for everyone. How do the role models attribute their turn when others also heard the call but did not respond? In our conversation, Sister Gail Worcelo offered observations from her journey that suggest the path of others. She called it a combination of grace (even though the “word is nebulous in a lot of ways”) and a “moment of readiness” from her prior experiences, especially her numinous encounter at age six, which opened her heart, and the educational training she got with Thomas Berry, which opened her mind (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008). Others suggest they were able to make the turn because of:

- Internal motivation, whether “hardwired [or if] somehow acquired,” to “do the right thing” (J. Aiosa, personal communication, December 13, 2007)
- Personal will and the support of others (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008)
- Having “faithfulness to a [Christian] path that you’re aiming to achieve rather than a particular goal;” the path “toward justice, toward integrity, toward joy.” And forgiveness: “Don’t take yourself too seriously . . . be serious, but . . . recognize you are going to trip once in awhile and maybe you are going to trip a lot” (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).
- Internal motivation because the connection “to and from” earth is so deep. Also, “friends, colleagues, and personal will” (J. DiBenedetto-Colton, personal communication, November 15, 2007)
- Grace and intolerance “for saying one thing and doing another” (i.e., personal integrity, “desire for congruence and authenticity”) (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008)

- “It’s a path we’ve chosen. . . There is a time when you stop talking and do something and it takes the individual to say, ‘I am going to do something.’” (J. and S. Hill, personal communication, November 14, 2007)
- Life crisis and timing caused a “quick kick in the butt” where “life situations all coming together at one time made it an easy decision because it was truly a choice of going back to what was or moving forward to what it was I hope to do” (J. Lorah, personal communication, December 10, 2007)
- Love and passion for the outdoors and transforming anger to action (R. Schnabel, personal communication, December, 12, 2007)
- God—“belief in something bigger than ourselves” and knowing that “the way we love God on a daily basis is to love our neighbors . . . and one of the most important ways that we can to that is to care for creation” (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008)
- “Moment of readiness;” Grace and intolerance at living a divided life—“straddling had come to an end” (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

In this list of reasons why the role models thought they were able to commit to a sustainable life while so many others could not, the roles of faith, Grace, and personal will, begin to emerge. These hint at topics that are covered in the next chapter. For each role model, the life lived up to the threshold moment prepared them to hear the call and respond.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES AND PATHWAYS OF CHRISTIAN SUSTAINABILITY

#### ROLE MODELS

*As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning.*  
(Earth Charter)

Four long months have passed since December's devastating ice storm and the April woods around my Vermont home are slowly emerging from under the thick blanket of ice and snow that covered the landscape shortly after the ice storm. Storm damage that was hidden and almost forgotten is becoming fully revealed as the covers are pulled back. All through the forest the extensive reach of the storm is evident—favorite trails, for example, are now impassable not only strewn with branches, but with whole trees that toppled under the weighty and unsustainable layers of ice.

On a long, slow walk last week I noticed the interplay of dead and living in the early spring forest. For the most part, the ice had pruned dead branches and diseased and dying trees. The newly pruned trees will have a better chance of flourishing now that the unhealthy parts are gone. The untouched trees were already stronger, healthier and more deeply rooted. Openings in the canopy from the fallen trees will let in the life-giving light needed for new beginnings and soon pioneer species will lead the way for a resurrected forest. As I ambled through the woods crunching remnant acorns from last fall, I was reminded of the mast yield and found myself hoping new red oaks would have a chance to gain traction in the openings left by the fallen hemlocks.

In so many ways, New England's December ice storm and its aftermath provided a fitting metaphor for humanity's critical moment and the call for a new beginning. At the outset of my

dissertation, I wrote of how the layers of ice reminded me of the layers of an unsustainable system that were beginning to collapse under the weight. These pruned and collapsing systems, however, provide the openings and sometimes the foundations and fertile ground for the new beginnings. Reminders of this ecological process are evident on any woodland walk. I am always entranced, for example, by the yellow birch's tenacious grip on the rotting hemlocks from which they typically emerge.

The journeys of each role model profiled in this dissertation involved their own kind of pruning, collapsing, dying, and transformation that are mirrored by the spring woods coming to life again with a new look after a significant transformative event. Regardless of their starting points, each role model was shaped and honed over the course of their journey to the threshold and was able to integrate wisdom gained with their vision and intention for a new way forward. Sister Margaret Galiardi wrote of this process in the context of her vision quest experiences—intentional threshold journeys she undertakes as part of her spiritual practice and experiences she offers to others as a guide. In different ways, however, each role model experienced what Margaret summarizes so poetically.

On a day long Medicine Walk in the Death Valley desert Margaret “resolved on the spot to continue to move forward in opening [herself] to deeper experience in the natural world” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 44). In the natural world she found “an unmediated presence of Mystery” that “appeared to be a critical complement to [her] intellectual studies of the New Cosmology” (p. 44). She also “began to wonder how all of this would fit into the wisdom of the ancestors in [her] own faith tradition” (p. 45). As if in response to these questions, Margaret began noticing

a variety of “bushes” on the desert floor. Some seemed vibrant even though it was winter; others were in a state of dormancy; while yet others were clearly dead. I began to notice the differences among them. I came upon a patch of dead ones. They grabbed at

the leg of my slacks and almost made me stumble. “Noticing” appeared to be the operative word: Take from the tradition that which is alive, but leave that which is dead to its own process of transformation, or else you stumble trying to do something beyond you which rests in the larger powers of the universe” (p. 45).

Like the other role models, Margaret learned over the course of her journey that which served and that which needed to be let go or transformed. She honed her intention and resolve and deepened in her practice of discernment; aspects of a committed and reflective life characteristic of other role models. In her study of nature writers who had “turned to earth” Marina Schauffler (2003) also found the integration of past, present and future to be a common trait, calling it the “art of remembrance” where “the present must incorporate the past . . . even as both give way to the future” (p. 31).

The capacity to look backward and forward while standing firmly rooted in the present is a characteristic shared by all the role models in my study. The “new beginning” called for by the *Earth Charter* does not imply wholesale disregard of what has been; instead role models use the wisdom of experience as both foundation and fertile ground for the emergent. They shed the diseased (dis-eased), dying, and dead, often a “huge cloak of conditioning” (Williams as cited in Schauffler, 2003, p. 27) and bring forward the living in a new way toward a new beginning. In this way, they operate as guides for the rest of us.

This chapter identifies some of the key attributes and processes that transformed these research participants into role models of ecological enlightenment and sustainable living. It picks up where Chapter 4 left off and extracts additional meaning from their stories. Specifically, I focus on the implications of spiritual maturity and discuss perspectives and pathways that are unique to Christian role models. While people of faith share many formative experiences with others who are committed to a sustainable way of life, my research shows they have some

distinct ways that seeds their initial ecological awakening and support them in staying the course and deepening their commitment. While different theological perspectives existed among the 10 research participants, the themes highlighted in this chapter focus on the common ground among these people of faith. The themes are presented under the following subheadings:

- Transformed on the Journey
- Enlarged in Perception
- Focused with Intention to Serve the Whole: Calls Within Calls
- Guided by Faith and Practice
- Building and Nurturing Community: You Can't Do It Alone
- Infused with Grace and Personal Conviction.

## **TRANSFORMED ON THE JOURNEY**

Each role model in his or her own way was transformed over the course of their lives, especially during the threshold journeys, to a deeper psycho-spiritual maturity. For me, a former environmental policy analyst, watershed planner, and coastal geomorphologist with little training in psychology, this was an unexpected and important finding. I had not expected my research journey, its own kind of threshold journey, to be such an exploration of human, especially faith, development.

In his magnum opus synthesizing over twenty years of work as a “depth psychologist, wilderness guide, and ecotherapist” (Plotkin, 2008, p. 12), Bill Plotkin, in part, relates stages of human development to ecological identity and personal capacity for sustainable action. His book, is far more than a guide to ecological identity development, but it provides valuable context for my work in addition to psychologist James Fowler’s seminal work on stages of faith

development in humans (Fowler, 1995). These two resources fleshed out some of the framing ideas presented in Thomashow's (1995 and 2002) descriptions on ecological identity and helped me understand the implications of the role model journeys.

Plotkin (2008) asserts that in order to make the "Great Turning" required at this "critical moment" we must "mature into people who are, first and foremost, citizens of Earth and residents of the universe, and our identity and core values must be recast accordingly" (p. 7). He shares the opinion held by other psychologists, theologians, and students of human development (e.g., Fowler, 1995, Borg, 2003, and Campbell, 1973) that "This kind of maturation entails a quantum leap beyond the stage of development in which the majority of people live today" (p. 7). All role models included in my study had matured beyond the narrow, yet culturally predominant and promoted view of self interest, to a more encompassing perspective.

The crucial tipping point or stage for this kind of transformation is one of "leaving home" (Fowler, 1995, p. 173; Plotkin, 2008, p. 233) to an "individuating-reflective faith" (Fowler, 1995, p. 174) where "you begin to search for the shape of the greater story you're destined to live, the larger conversation you might have with the world, a conversation that is not only the ego's" (Plotkin, 2008, p. 233). It is the stepping off point or threshold to a deeper adulthood.<sup>xxiv</sup> It is the crux of the Christian path of transformation indicated by this Gospel passage: "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (Mark 8:31, 34-35 as cited in Borg, 2003, p. 108). Being "born again" in this manner is "the way to recover our true self [by internally redefining] the self whereby a real person is born within us" (Borg, 2003, p. 117)." It is the path to "beginning to live our lives from the inside out rather than the outside in" (Buechner, as cited in Borg, 2003, p. 116) and it represents "the exodus from our individual and collective selfishness" that comes from "dying to

the false self” and being “born into an identity centered in the Spirit, in Christ, in God” (Borg, 2003, pg. 117). Because each role model had a panentheistic perspective and understood the deep connection between “Creator and created,” being centered in Spirit involved being centered in an ecological worldview, as well.

Plotkin and Fowler suggest the transformation usually is precipitated by a threshold journey of the nature described in Chapter 4. The journey may be intentional (like a formal rite of passage) or unexpected. It may unfold in a deliberate step-wise manner as a person notices and responds to discordance between their inner values and outer circumstances (such as Cal’s first time witness of “greed published on the landscape” or Gail’s anecdote of the sustainable and unsustainable “shelves” of her former monastery). Or, the journey may come unannounced and unplanned and be unwanted and “world-rattling” (Plotkin, 2008) such as the extreme series of traumatic life events that shook Jan to her core or the numinous encounter with Jesus that prompted Nancy’s conversion.

Regardless of how the journey started or unfolded, it marks “the transition [where] the late adolescent or adult must begin to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs and attitudes” (Fowler, 1995, p. 182). A hallmark of the passage to a more authentic self is tension as the journeyer critically reflects on who they are as an individual versus how they are defined “by a group or group membership” (Fowler, 1995; Plotkin, 2008). The passage typically involves the shedding of false selves (Borg, 2003; Bourgeault, 2004; Keating, 1986; Campbell, 1973), the “huge cloak of conditioning” so many of us wear (Williams, as cited in Schauffler, 2003, p. 27), and entails “critical distancing from one’s previous assumptive value system and the emergence of an executive ego” (Fowler, 1995, p. 179). Development of the “executive ego” (i.e., the “internal panel of experts who reserve the

right to choose and who are prepared to take responsibility for their choices;" Fowler, 1995, p. 179) is analogous to Plotkin's (2008) observation that this stage shift involves "conscious development of the four dimensions of the self"<sup>xxv</sup> (p. 289).

Fowler underscores the "frightening and somewhat disorienting" qualities of this transition. The person leaves their "conventional moorings" (Fowler, 1995, p. 178) and in western culture "the turn [often] is from an individual whose goal is to improve his socioeconomic standing to one whose primary motivation is to discover his destiny and turn it into lived reality as a gift to others" (Plotkin, 2008, p. 242). Successful navigation of the passage contributes to even deeper levels of psycho-spiritual maturity and ever wider and deeper "circles of identity" that are essential for eco- and cosmo-centric worldviews and compatible ways of life. As mentioned, few make the turn because it is frightening and disorienting. Failure to do so "turns our flowering world into a wasteland of open-pit mines, clear cuts, strip malls, and bill boards" (Plotkin, 2008, p. 251).

When faced with the threshold to a more sustainable way of life, each role model crossed and moved forward. Their courage to undertake this counter-cultural journey is a key characteristic of these people. Even when the journey was unexpected and brutal, as in Jan's case, the role models persevered and did not turn back. Fowler notes that many people begin the journey by "leaving home" but when confronted with life's ambiguities and challenges "they fail to interrupt their reliance on external sources of authority—and may even strengthen their reliance upon them—in order to cope with this relativity" (Fowler, 1995, p. 179). Role models are distinguished because they keep moving forward; several equated their journeys to the emergent and evolving nature of the Universe and they are committed to discerning, "What's the next thing?" (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

Several qualifications are necessary to emphasize when discussing the implications of role model journeys. First, these are not people who were in the dark and then suddenly awakened into the sustainability light. The awareness of “human-nature reciprocity” typically begins much earlier but one’s center of gravity remains focused on family and/or peer group and society (Plotkin, 2008) and viewpoints often are dichotomous (e.g., those corporate polluters are entirely at fault; Christians are the “root cause of the ecological crisis”); the integrative, nuanced maturity brought by critical self reflection is not well honed.<sup>xxvi</sup>

The research participants had varying levels of ecological awareness and action before they became considered role models by others. However, over time and through the journey their centers of gravity and influence began shifting. They became increasingly identified with the ecosystem and cosmos as primary references. They also became adept at holding the tension of apparent opposites and increasingly turned the mirror of awareness from the externalized other toward themselves. In short, they increasingly learned how to “live from the inside out, rather than the outside in” (Buechner, as cited in Borg, 2003, p. 116). This turn in awareness, which Plotkin (2003 and 2008) referred to as owning back your projections is reflected in the following excerpts from my interview with role model Nancy Sleeth:

Matthew and I always thought of ourselves as good environmentalists; we had raised our kids with cloth diapers and recycled and never drove anything more than a 4-cylinder car, but we were living out the American Dream and that American Dream has a huge environmental cost. . . . We took to hear the passage that says, “before you start looking at the speck in your neighbor’s eye, take out the plank in your own eye” (Matthew 7). And so we started working on that big 2x4 in our own eyes. Eventually, we got our electricity use down to one-tenth of the national average, our fossil fuel use we cut back by two-thirds, and our trash production by nine-tenths. After we got to that point, we thought it was okay to start writing and talking and preaching about the environment. . . . It’s not a matter of saying, “oh, them...” It is a matter of saying, “oh, us” (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

Second, not all journeys occurred with a sudden turn and clearly defined threshold moment. Several of the role models, most notably Cal and Joyce, were graced with childhood and adolescent conditions that almost model what Plotkin (2008) considers optimal for “cultivating wholeness and community in a fragmented world” (Plotkin, 2008). The expression “being born in the groove” (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008) applies to these role models who experienced early connection with and understanding of ecology and sustainable living, and who had such a life lovingly modeled for them. Yet, each role model did “leave home” in different ways and had their eyes opened wider at different times which entailed threshold crossings, however subtle, to deeper ecological and spiritual maturity.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that these journeys are rarely linear. Schauffler (2003) commented from her research that “the turn to earth is rarely a straight trajectory from old life to new; more commonly it involves a cycling back, a re-turning” (p. 7). Whether born in the groove or turned on a dime, as pioneers on “the road less traveled” the role models often had to go around obstacles or turn back and start anew. The challenge of making a new trail is what transformed them from their “old story” to the “new story” they live as role models. Schauffler (2003) considered this process one of creating “a spiral of growth where old patterns and perspectives are continually incorporated into the new” (p. 7). I consider this a process of working the ground to establish deep and stable roots like the mature red oaks that remained tall after the December ice storm.

After steeping in their stories for over a year, I have come to envision these role models as trees of life, with solid roots and wide outstretched branches. These are “deep” people, reflective and rooted in their faith and practice. As such, they have a stable base from which to spread their reach in “ever widening circles.”

Sister Gail Worcelo used this vertical and horizontal imagery when describing her process of ecological enlightenment. She considered the “vertical alignment of head, heart, and body” as “the manifestation in materiality” of her awakening and commitment to sustainability and the horizontal aspect to be the larger connection to others and the Divine. The horizontal element moves from the individual dimension of coming into alignment and “living from the inside out” to recognizing oneself as a node with all other beings in the Divine “Net” or “Field” in order to “become the perceptive ears and heart of that and let it move through us” (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

The image of vertical *alignment* and *horizontal* reach expresses two vital outcomes of the role models’ increasing psycho-spiritual maturity. Thomashow defined these as attributes of ecological identity work:

Ecological identity work yields a rich substrate, prompting critical reflection and deep introspection, a kind of personal awakening which allows people to bring their perceptions of nature to the forefront of awareness and to orient their actions based on their ecological worldview. . . . I see two simultaneous unfolding processes. Widening the circles of identification proceeds as a form of exfoliation, a peeling away of layers, a breaking of perceptual boundaries, allowing for more expansive circles of awareness. Opening the windows of memory prompts looking deep within, as one might peel the layers of an onion, the removal of each layer bringing you closer to the core (p. 23).

### **Alignment**

A central part of each role model’s journey was the theme of alignment. Each experienced a coming together of the *heart* and *head*, or cognitive and relational ways of knowing. But a third vital step of *embodiment* aided the transformation to role model status. In referencing the childhood mystical experience that “tore the veil asunder,” Sister Gail considered her process as one where

the 6-year old experience broke open myself at the level of the heart and [the teaching of Thomas Berry] was a major experience that broke open myself at the level of the mind. And then I think in the ensuing years it's been within myself embodying it. So, it pulled the head, the heart, and the body together. In the founding of Green Mountain Monastery on my journey it's been that integration of head, heart, body and embodying that (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

The vision quest served this function for Sister Margaret Galiardi because it “brought everything together.” She had “been reading and studying for years” but it took extended solo time in nature, and her building relationship with her daily kit fox visitor, to open her heart and body—“the intellectual with the affected”—as an integrated whole that transformed the trajectory of her life.

In different ways and with their own words each talked about the necessity of developing a relationship with the natural world and Spirit *in addition to* learning about and really understanding the ecological crisis and solutions. Some, like Margaret, gained knowledge of the issues (from ecological understanding to the story of the universe to the underlying and connecting theology) before re-developing (“re-membering” is the word she used) a heart and mind-opening relationship with nature as an adult. Others fell in love with the natural world, which led them to want to learn more. Rob Schnabel’s passion for the outdoors and camping still lights up his eyes and from his early passion he came to pursue his academic studies and eventual career as a watershed restoration scientist. Similarly, Joel and Stephan Hill developed a heart-connection with the natural world that over time increasingly prompted them to alter their lifestyle habits. *All* role models, by the time they attained role model status, had deeper knowledge of and intimate connection with the natural world and ecological/sustainability issues. Simply put, it does not seem to matter in what sequence it occurs, but role model’s hearts *and* minds needed to be integrated as two ways of knowing before the shift occurred.

More so, it appears that the intention and commitment to live ecologically enlightened and sustainably must be “concretized in the flesh” (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008) before the integrated heart and mind roots take lasting hold. For the role models, this occurred not only in terms of how they lived their day to day lives, but also each of them reached out to and consciously taught, guided, preached to others and/or created a tangible, material form (e.g., ecological learning centers, an Ecozoic Monastery, the Au Sable educational institute) that others could witness and participate with. As each achieved greater authenticity in their lives, where they felt aligned internally and externally (with words and deeds), they returned bearing gifts for others. This is what Campbell (1973) described as the consummating phase of the heroic journey and perhaps it also represents the final honing into role model status.

Plotkin (2003 and 2008) marked the threshold journey as the vital beginning of an ever maturing process toward authenticity. Living in alignment with one’s deepest yearnings and values contributed vitally to the integrated sustainability needed for role models. Rob articulated this aspect of his journey in describing how he transformed from an unsustainable place of anger to one where he is now motivated by passion; this was a critical turning point in his sustainability journey:

I think part of the angry time was working private consulting [for a developer] where I was getting paid to take things down—and yes I was restoring things somewhere else [but he ultimately was “not a total believer in mitigation”]. I took that time as training time so could get where I wanted to be. But I think that was part of my anger. I wasn’t doing what I wanted to do. I felt like I am on this earth for how long and this is not what I want to do with my life. I think getting rid of the anger was getting somewhere where I was living my life in the way I wanted to live it (R. Schnabel, personal communication, December, 12, 2007).

Cal DeWitt spoke of the necessary vertical alignment of head, heart and body *and* alignment of inner “true” self with outer actions using the concept of coherence. He believes

strongly in the notion of a two-book theology (discussed later in this chapter) and speaks of a three-fold coherence where the book of Nature and God's Word must cohere with one's actions in the world:

And it goes back to the two books of theology where the idea is that God is author of both the Word and the world, or the author of Creation and the Bible, and if you are in tune coherently within each and between each, you are also coherent with God's will (mostly) and that leads to joy. There is quite a difference between happiness and joy. You don't seek happiness. You do God's will, and from that, likely will emerge joy.

In this quote, Cal indicates the necessity of integrating cognitive knowledge of ecology and theology (mind), the heart yearning to do God's will, and the embodied response to discernment. Nancy Sleeth began her recent book with a similar evocation: "You see that his faith and his action were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did" (James 2:22 as cited in Sleeth, 2009, p. xiii).

When head and heart come together with embodied action a vital step in role model formation occurs. Related to this formation is the faith development stage Fowler (1995) named "Conjunctive Faith." All ecologically enlightened sustainability role models included in my research appear to have achieved the conjunctive faith stage; a few were just entering and two or three appear to be shifting toward a more "universalizing faith" (Fowler, 1995).

### **Conjunctive Faith and Beyond**

The threshold journey signifies the transition from Stage 3 "Synthetic-Conventional" or "Thespian" development where the opinions of others remain paramount to the more "Individuative-Reflective" or "Wanderer in the Cocoon" Stage 4 where the journeyer begins to find his or her authentic way (Fowler, 1995; Plotkin, 2008). This passage sets up conditions for even deeper levels of psycho-spiritual maturity that increasingly foster the eco- and spirit-

centered perspectives conducive for sustainable living. The role models in my research not only crossed the threshold to embark on or continue a courageous journey of “leaving home,” especially conventional ways of thinking and being and the “old cultural story” of limitless growth and consumption, but most of them passed through it and on to later developmental stages. Their threshold journeys honed their intentions and softened hardened ego defenses that often impede alignment of intentions and actions.

Fowler (1995) considers the transition beyond Stage 4 to be one of Conjunctive Faith, a more “porous and permeable stage” (p. 198) that “moves beyond the dichotomizing logic of Stage 4’s ‘either/or’ [and] sees both (or the many) sides of an issue simultaneously (pg. 185).” The Conjunctive Faith stage “suspects that things are organically related to each other; it attends to the pattern of interrelatedness in things, trying to avoid force-fitting to its own prior mind set” (p. 185). In many ways this faith stage is analogous to the condition of an “open heart” that Borg (2003) describes as “both the goal and means of transformation, the purpose and practice of the Christian life” (p. 149). The “open heart and seeing go together” from “the person right in front of our face” to “the landscape stretched out before us” (p. 161). Quoting from Ephesians (1:18), Borg comments that “an open heart and enlightenment go together” (i.e., we ‘see with the eyes of our heart enlightened’) (p. 161). Other attributes, or “fruits of the spirit” that accompany an open heart include being “alive to wonder,” feeling gratitude, and offering compassion and a passion for justice (Borg, 2003, pp. 161-162). Each of these qualities I experienced directly through my role model interactions. Fowler (1995) attributes the qualities of justice to the Conjunctive Stage’s readiness “for closeness to that which is different and threatening to self and outlook” and noticed that justice in this stage is “freed from the confines of tribe, class, religious community or nation” (p. 198). All of these are conditions that not only craft a more expansive

and inclusive religious worldview, but also a deeper and wider ecological worldview as demonstrated through Sister Gail Worcelo's observations on how her circles of identity shifted:

You know, the past was like interreligious dialogue, from ecumenical to interreligious. The whole thing of interreligious dialogue—it's the experience of crossing over and then coming back and I think now we are up to interspecies and can we cross over and come back... and being able to be those vehicles in the field and explore what that means to cross over and then come back because then you are changed (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

Part of the Stage 5 "work" is to "come to terms with its own unconscious—the unconscious personal, social and species or archetypal elements that are partly determinative of our actions and responses" (Fowler, 1995, p. 186). Depth psychologists consider this to be "shadow work" and the art of "withdrawing projections" (Plotkin, 2003). This process is related to the blame-guilt-action sequence described by Thomashow (1995) of transforming blame of the externalized other to an inward view in order to accept personal responsibility for environmental degradation and responsible action.

Jungian psychologist Robert Johnson in a masterful book on *Owning Your Own Shadow* described this process with the image of a mandorla, the "almond-shaped segment that is made when two circles partly overlap" (1993, p. 98). The symbol "signifies nothing less than the overlap of opposites" (Johnson, 1993, p. 98) that is the process of coming together that occurs in the Conjunctive Faith Stage where a person becomes "alive to paradox and the truth in apparent contradictions" and tries to "unify opposites in mind and experience" (Fowler, 1995, p. 278).

Johnson (1993) considered the mandorla to be "so important for our torn world" because it addressed the many dichotomous perspectives that "set a good possibility against a bad one and banish the bad one so thoroughly that we lose track of its existence" (pp. 101-102). The relationship of this process to environmental degradation is clear and was indicated in Chapter

2—for many the natural environment, the “wild” is something to be used, domesticated or banished. This was a historically important perspective that persists in the minds of some today. Equally dichotomous are the perspectives some environmentalists persist in having that Christians are the “root cause of the ecological crisis” or that some Christians have of environmentalists as pagan tree huggers.

All the role models have moved well beyond this dichotomous perspective and inhabit the space in between; I consider this to be the place of “mandorla consciousness” and Johnson (1993) indicated this place to be the one where “healing of the split” begins and where new beginnings arise. This consciousness also lets one build bridges with others. Johnson considered it the way we “transfer from a cultural life to a religious life” and described the process in the following manner:

The overlap [of the two circles of perspective] is very tiny at first, only a sliver of a new moon; but it is a beginning. As time passes, the greater the overlap, the greater and more complete is the healing. The mandorla binds together that which was torn apart and made unwhole—unholy. It is the most profound religious experience we can have in life (pp. 102-103).

In order for religion (and the religious) to meet its fullest potential in responding to the ecological crisis, it must inhabit the space between the apparent opposites of the “Old and New Story” and “Earlier and Emerging Paradigms” (Swimme and Berry, 1994; Borg, 2003) and the other dichotomies that separate humans from nature, nature from spirit, and humans from each other. It is in “the space between such creative tensions [that] there can emerge the deeply motivating spiritual resource of the religious traditions toward grounded transformative action” (Tucker, 2003, pp. 36-50). The space in between arises from the tension between old and new perspectives around dogma, ritual and symbols, moral authority, soteriology, ethics, and the

comprehensive context (Tucker, 2003, p. 36). It is in the creative place “in between” that “retrieving, re-evaluating, and reconstructing traditions” can occur (p. 36).

The role models inhabit the space in between. To varying levels, each has achieved a conjunctive faith perspective and provides mandorla consciousness. In doing so, they are birthing from the center new ways of living for an ecological age. Conjunctive faith enables these role models to:

- Blend the old and new stories
- Have a panentheistic perspective that enables them to consider a “two-book” theology and a sense of “calls within calls”
- Integrate/hold science (especially ecology and cosmology) and religion and bind them together to make meaning
- Work with others as bridge builders.

### **Blending Old and New Stories**

As described at the outset of this chapter, the role models incorporate the past with the present, even “as both give way to the future” (Schauffler, 2003, p. 31). A critical aspect of this is “revising and remaking”—re-storying—their religious traditions as needed for an ecological age. Quite a few of the role models have written extensively about this (DeWitt, Galiardi, C.P., Sleeth, and Worcelo, in particular) and all of them live this integrated perspective in their daily lives. In our interview, Sister Margaret Galiardi expressed the importance of “trying to pursue the transformed understanding of what it means to be human, of the planet, of an understanding of God and the Christian Story” in order to make the turn to a more sustainable way and then to share that understanding with others: “I find that unless someone is able to speak to the Christian

community about an integration of cosmology and theology, they ain't coming and we can't afford to be alienating anyone" (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008).

Cal Dewitt (1994) and Matthew Sleeth (2006) address "stumbling blocks to creation's care and keeping (DeWitt, p. 73) many of which are related to the "old story" and dichotomous ways of thinking such as a dominion as "domination" theology. By occupying the space in the middle, DeWitt, Sleeth and all the role models are helping to bring religion and people of faith into an ecological era.

### **Panentheistic Perspective and Two-Book Theology**

Ecologically oriented theologies believe in the concept of immanence, the recognition of God within all things (Carroll, 2001; Cobb, 2001; Hessel and Ruether, 2000), and panentheism, a recognition of the interconnectedness of all things with God, as God is "the encompassing Spirit in whom everything that is, is. The universe is not separate from God, but in God" (Borg, 2003, p. 66; Fox, 2006). A panentheistic perspective does not imagine God "as a personlike being 'out there'" but sees God as the One in whom we "live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28 as cited in Borg, 2003, p. 66). Borg summarizes the "central claim" of panentheism in a phrase that carries profound implications for ecological living: "God is 'the More' who is 'right here'" (p. 66) infusing all things.

The panentheistic perspective provides the underlying faith basis for several of the role models as illustrated in the following quote from Sister Margaret Galiardi:

You have to understand that as a member of a religious community, my primary commitment is to the Divine, is to spiritual life. It's pivotal, it's key to me. I think probably the simplest way of answering this is. . . I don't know if you've come across the expression of Panentheism? [I answer, yes.] So, I mean you know, the earth has its own intrinsic value and although God cannot be contained or limited by the earth, God can't

be separated from it. So, the presence of the Divine just permeates the planet. So, you know, from a spiritual perspective or a theological perspective, what are we doing? Thomas Berry talks about this from a cosmological perspective when he says that, you know, every being is a mode of expression of the divine. If you take a panentheistic approach, that to me fits right into it. So, what are we doing? What are we doing with the destruction—the extinction of species, the destruction of the forest, the ecosystems? There is nothing about the presence of the Divine. But it cannot be separated from the intrinsic worth of the planet. I don't know how else to say it. To me, everyone needs to be concerned about the planet. I think for people of faith – when you understand this – it adds a whole other dimension to it. You know, I mean, Thomas talks about that in the future the first instinct of religious consciousness must be to save the planet as a voice of the Divine, which, once silenced will never be heard again (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008).

The implications of that awareness on how to live are far reaching and can be frightening when one first really begins to understand:

For me, matter does not exist without an infusion of Spirit. And people are not able to recognize it; well, we've separated it. How we are inhabiting our places is furthering our separation. Children do not have an experience of the natural world. But, if people get enough of a framework, that Spirit is in everything – I've seen a wash of fear come over them because they are realizing that all the sudden they are recognizing God. Oh my goodness, you want to be forgiven for not recognizing it; it is scary to people to think that God is in everything (J. DiBenedetto-Colton, personal communication, November 15, 2007).

Another basis for religious environmental action is belief that God's Word is revealed in two "books"—nature and the Bible. Coherence between the two can provide the theological foundation and practical guidance for living an ecologically enlightened and sustainable life. It is not about either/or, Divine or nature, Creator or creation. A two-book theology brings the two together coherently; this is the mandorla:

It goes back to the two books of theology where the idea is that God is author of both the Word and the world, or the author of Creation and the Bible, and if you are in tune coherently within each and between each, you are also coherent with God's will (mostly) and that leads to joy. . . . Before we really had any ecology at all, it came for me about 1955 when Eugene Odum's first edition of *Fundamentals of Ecology* came out, somewhere in there. That was a new subject matter, but I was an ecologist already because it has to do with... In biblical study, if you are studying the bible, you talk about hermeneutics, which is the business of interpretation of text and I was already doing that

in the natural world in the reading of the book of Nature or the book of Creation. I didn't know the word then, but was doing the same sort of thing. You are working on interpretation. Another way of saying it [is] the natural world, in fact, the whole world, people included, the whole creation is something that can be read and the key here is coherence. Everything has to be coherent. Everything has to make sense with respect to everything else (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).

## **Integrating Science and Religion**

A panentheistic perspective and/or consideration of a two-book theology support a viewpoint of integrating science (especially ecology) with religion and faith. This hallmark of Conjunctive Faith prepares one for “significant encounters with other traditions than its own” (Fowler, 1995, p. 186) including scientific and religious views. This ability to integrate perspectives is an important attribute that all role models share—science *and* religion are considered compatible and they integrate perspectives of both in their religious *and* ecological worldviews. Several role models expressed how understanding science helped them “bring more of themselves to prayer” (see section on Prayer later in this chapter).

The following quotations from the interviews illustrate how role models integrate science and religion and in doing so, stand in the middle performing the healing work needed for an ecological age:

The key hermeneutic for scripture is to use scripture to interpret scripture. In other words, you take what has very clear meaning and if you are pretty sure of the meaning of a particular familiar text, you interpret other, more difficult passages in terms of the text you already know to be well understood. So what you are doing in scriptural analysis and study is that you adhere to the principle of coherence. And similarly in the study of nature you are; the Second Law of Thermodynamics has to cohere with what you see in food chains and food pyramids and animal and plant populations. The beauty that has come to me in my development of these ideas, is that the two books together must cohere and that resolves all sorts of problems (it generates some, too), but it solves all sorts of problems because what, for me, that does is it steers me clear of fruitless debate. This principle of coherence [has been] emerging the last 2-3 years in my mind as being really basic to understanding everything. It is basic to understanding the world's religions and

philosophies and science. It all has to cohere. So what you discover in this is there is a place here for what you would call quality of religious belief [and] there is a place here for what you call quality of scientific belief; the high quality material coheres with everything else we know and the lower quality doesn't and it doesn't pay for us to debate and discuss things for which we, our information and our understanding is still of low quality, which means, stuff that doesn't cohere. If someone says, "I heard this theory that climate change is really governed by fleas on the backs of frogs," I'll say, "hmmm, and would you like another cup of coffee" (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).

By immersing myself in nature, I was seeing evidence of him [God] everywhere. It's almost like, "How can you not believe in God" when you are in nature. And, the more you know about, I believe, the scientific processes that went into—which is our way of explaining how these things got here—the more you believe in God, because the evidence is so beautiful and so complicated, that how else? No man could have come up with this. Being in nature, I think, lets us learn about God just through his physical evidence and then it lets us hear God because of the quiet (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

[By contemplating the cosmos during times of meditation and prayer] I become the meeting place of ancient Christian tradition and modern scientific discovery. The integration of both form the matrix of my prayer. Each perspective is needed: the view inward that the Christian tradition in its sustained contemplation and sacred texts offers, and the view outward — the telescopic revelation into Mystery that science articulates (Worcelo, 2005).

In explaining the importance of integrating science and religion, Worcelo shared a quote from "paleontologist, Jesuit priest, and Christian mystic" Teilhard de Chardin. He wrote "less and less do I see any difference between research and adoration" (as cited in Worcelo, 2005).

Gail expressed that for Teilhard "prayer was a meditation on the Universe, informed by scientific knowledge, open to Mystery" (Worcelo, 2005). This perspective is one shared by the role models. By seeing nature and religion as compatible kin rather than antagonistic enemies, these role models "photosynthesize the Light of Christ to become food for the future" (Worcelo, 2005).

## **Work With Others as Bridge Builders**

The Conjunctive Faith stage and mandorla consciousness also prepare the role models to be effective bridge builders to others. In their work and lives, these people cross boundaries of traditions and bring people with different perspectives together. Each has done this in his or her own ways. Some of this capacity is described later in the chapter in the section on community. Here I provide a few examples of how role models cross the boundaries of their familiar communities to reach out to others.

Leading Evangelical Cal DeWitt started our interview by saying,

It looks kind of like I am working with the Evangelicals, which I am, but I've been working with mainline [Protestant] and with Jewish people. I've produced a lot of Jewish leaders in environmental stewardship through the University of Wisconsin. So, I work pretty broadly (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).

The Sleeths have found an audience with the Sierra Club, in particular, along with other environmental organizations. In doing so, they are opening doors to important dialogue and future collaborations, even though this partnership has not been well received by some others who share their religious tradition:

We've done a lot of work with the Sierra Club even though a lot of Evangelicals will say, "What!" We believe in building bridges. We've spoken to the Board of Trustees for the Sierra Club in San Francisco and shared our faith journey (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

Joyce offered a summary statement that may apply to all the role models:

[My mother] appreciated how people observed their spirituality. To her, and that was my model, it did not matter what their religion was—what mattered was that connection to the sacred.

What matters is "connection to the sacred" and for these role models, connection to the sacred and doing sacred work includes bridging the worlds of science, environmentalism and religion.

By standing in the middle, they become the mandorla that heals.

## ENLARGED IN PERCEPTION

*I live my life in widening circles  
that reach out across the world.  
I may not complete this last one  
but I give myself to it.*

Rilke (as cited in Barrows and Macy, 2005, p. 45)

Each role model has a broader perspective than the typically characterized individualistic, “me first,” anthropocentric U.S. orientation. They have, as Mary Evelyn Tucker suggested, re-centered their lives “within, not apart from, the myriad species with whom we share the planet” (Tucker, 2003, p. 10). This broader way of seeing was developed in numerous ways and is expressed to different levels among the interviewees. As we saw in Chapter 4, some were profoundly influenced by mission trips and/or travel and living experiences in other cultures. Others had a numinous encounter that shifted their perceptions. Each connected deeply with nature. All participate in spiritual practice(s). Often perceptions shifted when learned knowledge was embodied at different levels, taken into the heart and experienced through the body. This condition is the result of the threshold journey and psychospiritual maturity.

In their comprehensive study of people “living lives of commitment in a complex world,” Daloz et al. (1996) considered “The single most important pattern we have found in the lives of people committed to the common good is what we have come to call a *constructive, enlarging engagement with the other*” (p. 63). The key aspect of this pattern was “*constructive engagement*”—a concept they defined as one that forms when “some threshold had been crossed, and people had come to feel a *connection* with the other” (p. 67). Daloz et al., focused their discussion on the human “other.” Role models of ecological enlightenment and sustainable action extend “other” to the non-human realm and have “constructive, enlarging engagement with” human and non-human others. The capacity to expand one’s perceptual environment, or

umwelt, is vital to learning how to “perceive global environmental change” and act accordingly (Thomashow, 2002).

Among the role models for this study, the widening circles expressed as movement from a human-centered definition of neighbor to an ecosystem, cosmic, and ultimately mystical or universal sense:

- Neighbor encompasses all human others and addresses the strong social justice lens through which most of the role models view the world. As their journey deepened, the social justice lens widened to a broader ecological justice orientation.
- Ecological worldview where the conventional interpretation of “Love thy neighbor as thyself” is internalized to action and applied to all beings. Related to the ecological worldview is a broadened sense of compassion and justice
- Cosmological worldview, encompassing an understanding of evolution and recognition of the humans’ role in the whole. Enables a perspective of deep time that looks backward to ancestral wisdom and universal origins and forward to consider future generations.
- Mystical consciousness, felt sense of embodied, “unitive” connection with the Whole. This is analogous to Fowler’s (1995) Stage 6, Universalizing Faith. Some role models exemplify the traits Fowler uses to describe this stage: they commit their “total beings” to “visions born out of radical acts of identification with persons and circumstances where the futurity of being is being crushed, blocked or exploited” (Fowler, p. 203). In doing so, they “call into question the compromise arrangements in our common life that have acquired the sanction of conventionalized understandings of justice” (p. 202).

This awakening in consciousness and widening circles of identity is evidenced in Margaret’s transformation:

Well, in the book I am working on I talk about most of us having had a kind of acosmic spirituality (not cosmic). I mean, life and faith and spirituality had nothing to do with earth. I mean, I think I thought I was just plopped on this world, and now I mean, it’s a realization in my body I carry the whole evolutionary process. [What this] whole understanding has done for me is incredible expansion of my own sense of who God is. [It has] created a much larger context for me to work out of. I’m sure you are familiar with the cosmic walk and usually when it is done you see Jesus... it’s like near the end... it’s like, “oh.” You know what I mean? You see the human, you see Jesus, it’s like “Oh...” It’s an incredible expansion and it’s made me more sensitive, enormously sensitive to the sometimes arrogance of theologians and what we are missing by not taking cosmology . . . Theology is reflecting on God and all things in light of God... and

we thought this was theology (just a small piece). Now, we turn around and we look at all this—this is all things—and that has got to impact our understanding of who God is. I do remember at one point feeling like I was bringing more of myself to prayer and I was wondering what that was about, because now I know in my body, I carry all 13.7 Billion years. When that becomes conscious and when you bring that up... it's a huge shift (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008).

In her Chapter 4 profile we tracked Margaret's initial involvement with human others that broadened over time to eventually encompass other beings such as the kit fox on her vision quest and her increasingly expanding cosmological context. Margaret summed up her journey in part with a quote paraphrased from the work of cosmologist Brian Swimme; it speaks of the vital importance of widening perceptions. For Margaret and others, "Enlightenment is grasping the depths to which we belong."

Table 5 provides additional illustrative quotes for each perspective using quotes from the role model interviews.

**Table 5. Role Model Quotes Illustrating Expanding Circles of Identity**

<b>CIRCLE OF IDENTITY</b>	<b>ILLUSTRATIVE ROLE MODEL QUOTES</b>
Neighbor	My brother drowned when he was 32 years old when we were all together on a family vacation. And, I did a tiny bit of research and it was kind of like, "Oh, duh," I can't believe I didn't, I couldn't face it... but this is just a revelation in the last few weeks. I believe my brother was a casualty of global warming, of climate change. In 1995, which is when he died, was the second worst hurricane season on record. And people died in Bermuda, my brother wasn't the only one that died, but it kind of woke me up to the fact that people are losing their lives every day and when you talk about neighbor, yes, neighbor can be someone in our family, but it could be someone across the world, too. [Neighbor] includes all creatures. It includes people that are living now, people that will be living in the future. It includes the person in Honduras who can't drink the water that runs in the stream and goes through their village where Matthew was practicing medicine there with Emma and now they have to walk 3-4 miles every day (to get their water) because we want to get our coffee a little bit cheaper and you know all that... [Neighbors] include the people that are in the city where we live, or that we live close to

<b>CIRCLE OF IDENTITY</b>	<b>ILLUSTRATIVE ROLE MODEL QUOTES</b>
	<p>now...it's the poorest, the least among us...where their children live in the houses with the lead paint or the ones that have the asthma... These are all of our neighbors and it is also people in future generations that we will never meet and who will never be able to thank us for making these small decisions that will impact their lives. The decisions we make on a daily basis have global implications and so when I decide to change my regular light bulbs for compact fluorescents, it means that—well, if every family in America changed just their five most used light bulbs, 21 coal plants could be shut down tomorrow. That means that for every coal plant (I hope I have these statistics right, it's from some Harvard study), 120 lives are saved per coal plant. That's very real lives and God says that he cares about every sparrow, so he certainly cares about every person that my light bulbs are killing. The decisions that I make affect other people (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).</p>
Ecosystem	<p>At the core is belief in a single Creator of all that we see and all that has been and all that will be, and believing that the Creator is just and right, not because everything is done by committee, but by one great mind. So that no matter what you see or find in the marsh behind my house, which may at first look like a big bunch of mush, you can come to nature with the assurance that it has great integrity. And as you come to it with that theocentric and wholistic view, what becomes shockingly apparent is that it does have integrity. . . . It's all one grand symphony of interaction. Everything works together. The way atoms work and the way ecosystems work are all in accord. What's beautiful about this as I study it as a scientist, is that it in fact turns out to be this way. So in my work, I have been continually reaffirmed in my faith. The faith allows you to proceed as if the world truly were whole. Then, as a scientist, you work to make these discoveries and learn from everyone else's discoveries and it comes back to say, yes, it is whole. That affirms one's faith again (DeWitt, as cited in Webb, 1998, p. 95).</p>
Cosmos	<p>I guess our Catholic and Christian mystics knew centuries ago about the oneness of all, but now that's being proven by science and by this New Story so that's attuned me much more to our mystical tradition. For instance, like what we've been saying on this retreat<sup>xxvii</sup>—we're not doing away with any key elements of our faith; we want to present the story and we're able to see those elements in our faith as operational throughout the story. So, for me, it deepens my sense of faith in God—it's not just the God of a 2000 year Christian story, but it's a God that pre-dates that as the story of the Jewish people, and it pre-dates that as God of all people and it's the God of the planet's story and the Universe story (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008).</p> <p>We come out of thirteen billion years of unfolding; we are vital dust, a further</p>

CIRCLE OF IDENTITY	ILLUSTRATIVE ROLE MODEL QUOTES
	development of the original fireball. In this morning prayer I try to locate myself in our galactic neighborhood. I have learned that the galaxy in which I pray is 100,000 light years wide, and that a single light year spans six trillion miles. I have been told that our nearest neighbor, the Andromeda Galaxy, is 2.3 million light years away. I shudder at the magnitude of space and time. I know we are located in vastness, in the vast heart of God (Worcelo, 2005).
Mystical/ Universal	<p>I reflect on the fact that I am made of that same star stuff (Worcelo, n.d.).</p> <p>We are the universe gathered in this moment, in this space, celebrating its profound singularity. This explosion in motion is one radiant being: incarnate, conscious, Christic, undivided (Worcelo, 2005).</p> <p>Transformed consciousness means awakening into oneness. We are that sensing being... we are it. It's just one and it's integral with itself at every level. And so it was just overwhelming in a certain sense. It is so beautiful in its integrity and its purity and its self-sacrificial nature and it was conversion for me to realize, not at the head level—I mean, I got it through the head but it dropped into my spirit. This whole thing for 13.7 billion years has been giving. It just is that. It just is that, sacrificial. Nothing hoards in the Universe. Like the totality of it is a continual outpouring for the sake of the whole and I am just overwhelmed by that beauty of what it really is and then having a sense inside of myself of – this thing isn't about you. Shifting at the personal level ... like it is so much bigger than any of us, so like get over whatever every little thing that you and everybody else is going through. . . . So, all you are is it; and it's always replenishing. And so I feel it, I know that, and that's conversion. That's coming from a different place. . . . You are there with the whole thing. It's just that (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).</p>

Ever widening circles of identity are vital for developing ecological enlightenment and sustainable action through creating empathic connection to the “other” but also because broader perceptions enable role models to hold the perspective of deep time and have the capacity to understand and evaluate life cycle “costs” of material choices. Each role model had, to different levels, an understanding of “the depth to which they belonged” (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008) and recognition that their “ancestry includes all forms of life, all the stars, the galaxies, even the fireball at the heart of time” (Worcelo, 2000). This

understanding enabled them to draw on and integrate historical/ancestral references and wisdom. It also provided a firm foundation from which to gaze into the future.

In describing the four-fold wisdom “available to guide us into the future” Berry (1999) named the historical and ancestral wisdom from indigenous peoples, women, classical traditions and science, as well as current, emerging knowledge from those same traditions, as vital for creating the “emerging age when humans will be a mutually enhancing presence on the Earth” (p. 176). Through study and lived experience, each role model looks back at these traditions, considers current trends, and brings relevant knowledge to the future. Deep time perspectives extend to the future and several role models use “seven generation” thinking and/or consideration of the children, “all the children.” C.P. and Margaret Galiardi shared a poem during the Holy Week retreat that evoked the future orientation of role model perspectives and decision making:

To the children  
To all the children  
To the children who swim beneath  
The waves of the sea, to those who live in  
The soils of the Earth, to the children of the flowers  
In the meadows and the trees in the forest, to  
All those children who roam over the land  
And the winged ones who fly with the winds,  
To the human children too, that all the children  
May go together into the future in the full  
Diversity of their regional communities (Berry, 1999, dedication page).

Broader perceptions also foster the capacity to understand and evaluate life cycle implications of material goods. As mentioned, a shared characteristic of each role model’s sustainability practice is conscious, or mindful, consumerism. Rarely do the role models make a purchase or use a product without knowing its origins and its future fate. Because of this careful consideration of life cycle costs, all role models have a strong “buy local” sensibility and many

grow their own food when practical and seek used items (from houses to clothing) instead of buying new. During our interviews, I was repeatedly impressed by the extent of knowledge and quality of care that went into decision-making.

## **FOCUSED WITH INTENTION TO SERVE THE WHOLE: CALLS WITHIN CALLS**

Conjunctive faith/mandorla consciousness brought together environmental and religious sensibilities in the role models. What was born from the place in the middle, the mandorla, was the commitment to serve God and nature, Creator and creation; this was the development of calls within calls.

C.P. explained how his academic pursuits of environmental studies and theology were not informing each other: “The divine was not mentioned when I was studying the science of environment in college and earth was not mentioned later when I was studying theology. So, I had a deep love for both—theology and environmental studies, but they didn’t seem to be informing each other.” His early work as a parish priest did not enable him to pursue his love of environment and he “found a sense there was more to my calling than being a parish priest. Something was missing”. When he discovered the work of Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis at Genesis Farm he became intrigued, “turned on,” and pursued an opportunity to do an earth literacy program there. This exposure to the Universe Story (Swimme and Berry, 1994) and intense training in earth literacy at Genesis Farm:

...gave me a whole new perception of myself, of earth, of the universe, and of the call within a call—an ecologic call within a religious call. I go in depth with that in answer to your question because I was introduced to another worldview at a very young age, a tender age [when he went on an extended mission trip to Mexico], and I think that opened me up to an ecological worldview some years later and the perspective the New Story brings because I was already pliable from this earlier experience. So, that is how

one flowed into another—a religious calling that opened up into an ecological calling which I think we all have. The Pope says we need to embrace our ecological vocation, so I just came to appreciate mine after I took on a religious vocation (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008).

A leading Evangelical used similar language in describing how the faith journey she shares with her husband unfolded in conjunction with their awakening understanding of environmental responsibility:

That was our faith journey and that was paralleling our environmental journey and informing that environmental journey because the more we came to study the Word, the more we saw that the life Jesus led; it was absolutely clear. If you could see me I'd be holding my right hand up on one end and my left hand way out on the other end and I'd say that the journey of our life is moving a little bit closer to the life that Jesus led. We have a long, long, long way to go, but we are on that journey. Part of that journey... Jesus said, "If you have two cloaks, give one away." How many of us only have one coat in our closet, or one pair of shoes, or one sofa, or one of anything. All of us have way too much stuff and we consume way too much without caring about our neighbors. Jesus tells us we are to love our Lord with all our heart, minds and strength and the way that we do it is to love our neighbor as ourselves and that is what we try to do. The ways that we do that is by caring for the earth because that has huge impacts, especially on the least among us, on the poorest of our country and of the world and, as well, for future generations and people that we will never meet (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

Once the role models recognized and began responding to these integrated calls, they sought and were compelled to align their actions with their new way. The sown seeds of ecological enlightenment and sustainable action burst forth with resolve. Each role model, in his or her own way, developed a strong intention toward and commitment to living a different way. They came to see their call to ecological sustainability as integrated with their religious call. This notion of intentionality is recognized in Borg (2003) where he considers the "intentionality" of awakening (being "born again"). Borg (2003) writes (note: for most of these role models you can use the word God, but also replace it with the word earth and/or sustainability; they are "born again" with intention to be sustainable):

Spirituality combines awareness, intention, and practice. I define it as *becoming conscious and intentional about a deepening relationship with God*. The words are very carefully chosen. *Becoming conscious of our relationship with God*: I am convinced that we are all already in relationship to God and have been from our birth. God is in relationship with us: spirituality is about becoming aware of a relationship that already exists. *Becoming intentional about our relationship with God*: spirituality is about paying attention to the relationship. . . . We do so in the ways we pay attention in a human relationship: by spending time in it, attending to it, being thoughtful about it (p. 120).

Many made a conscious commitment to shape their whole life to support the growth of their sustainability seeds: “The whole thing unfolded in the context of a life that supported it, because my whole life is geared towards supporting and stretching that very spirituality that was inherent through a very differentiated path of devout Catholicism” (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008). Deepening commitment to their sustainability paths often resulted from their intentions to lead fully integrated, coherent lives. They could no longer tolerate being out of alignment in their faith and works<sup>xxviii</sup> and were compelled to keep going in their journeys. The quest for integrity propelled them forward. They came to practice discernment, not only of their religious calls, but their ecological calls. Because of the integrated nature of their religious and ecological callings, this posture of deep listening that characterizes discernment has led these role models to take on the vocation of sustainable living.

This commitment to discernment is demonstrated in the following quote from one of the role models; the challenge and commitment is experienced in different ways by each of the role models:

I use to say that I wished God would send Gmail. “You know, I really want to serve Lord and I hear your call, but if you could give me a few more details about how you want me to accomplish this it would help a lot.” But then I realized that the Lord gave us free will and making those decisions is part of the journey, too. And, he could have done that—he could have just laid it all out. And some people do feel the Lord speaking to them a lot more than I do. I feel this presence all the time, but I don’t get these clear instructions and some people feel that they do, and that is wonderful, and I don’t doubt it at all, but the way that it works for Matthew and me is that we have to be in prayer all the time to be at

God's will and then we try to figure out the details. And, we get along. There's times where we've gone down the wrong path, and C.S. Lewis says the surest way of getting back on the right path is just to turn around, so it's not like we make perfect decisions in this ministry, but Matthew is really good about figuring out when something doesn't feel like it's going the right way and stepping back (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

## **GUIDED BY FAITH AND PRACTICE**

Each role model's sustainability journey was guided and supported by their faith and practice. While each expressed these in different ways, their faith perspectives provided the vision, guidebook, trail markers, maps and other navigational tools for the journey. Their various spiritual and religious practices offered discipline and fitness for the journey. Borg (2003) considers "practice" to be essential for birthing and developing the journey.

Coming to deeper understanding about their faith, knowing at all levels (especially through the cognitive *and* relational/heart) the interconnection of their faith with their ecological call and commitment, and nurturing both with practice is what sets these role models apart. Faith *and* practice are critical. Environmental education, time outdoors, and other means of cultivating an ecological identity were a vital part of the mix; but for these Christian role models, coming into ecological enlightenment and committing to a sustainable life occurred within the context of their religious faith integrated with ecological understanding (and in some cases cosmological understanding) and development of the interior (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008) through practice.

## **Faith**

In their comprehensive study of people “leading lives of commitment in a complex world,” Daloz et al. (1996) explore questions of faith in addition to other topics. The research team was curious about “how [their research participants] make meaning, how they construe life as a whole, how they imagine the relationship of self, world, and cosmos, the seen and the unseen” (Daloz et al., 1996, p. 142). Faith, in particular religion, had “either played a direct, explicit role” or was “an influential feature of the wider ecology of their lives” (p. 142), especially in guiding their research participants to be “responsive to and responsible with the whole of life” and to “act on its behalf” (p. 142). These findings affirm the vital link between faith and works that I discovered among my research participants.

The term faith has many meanings and interpretations. For my dissertation I use the description of faith provided by preeminent theologian Marcus Borg. He describes four ways of faith, each of which is demonstrated by my research participants (Borg, 2003):

1) Faith as *Assensus*, faith as belief: This type of faith is more mental, “giving one’s mental assent to a proposition, as believing that a claim or statement is true” (p., 28). The “vocabulary of believing and belief in contemporary Christianity” is very common and typically “means believing that there is a God, believing that the Bible is the revelation of God, and believing that Jesus is the Son of God and that he died for our sins” (p., 26).

The remaining three ways of faith are more relational and of the heart.

2) Faith as *Fiducia* is “faith as trust, radical trust in God” (p. 31): This kind of faith does *not* mean trusting in a set of statements about God, but trusting in God. This is a deeper, felt, sense of faith that is more embodied than faith as *Assensus*/belief. It is a “knowing” trust of God.

3) Faith as *Fidelitas*, faith as “fidelity,” references faithfulness to our relationship with God: The way to be faithful to God means not only to love God, but to love that which God loves, namely the neighbor and indeed the whole of creation. Therefore, faith as *Fidelitas* includes an ethical imperative” (Borg, 2003, p. 34). It implies the faithful action that is the basis of the Great Commandment and the Second One: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your life force, and with all your mind, and with all your strength....You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Faith as *Fidelitas* is vital to these Christian sustainability role models.

4) Faith as *Visio* is “faith as a way of seeing”: “This is faith “as a way of seeing *the whole*” and Borg (2003) suggests that “how we see the whole will affect how we respond to life” (p., 34).

Role models live lives of faith, guided by belief, held up by radical trust, disciplined in their commitments and actions, and broadened in sight. Each of these expressions of faith informs and affects the role models’ ecological enlightenment and sustainability practice. Using quotes from the interviews, Table 6 illustrates the relationship between faith and ecological calling for the role models; all facets of faith as defined by Borg (2003) are referenced. The remainder of this section provides additional discussion.

**Table 6. Example Role Model Statements on Faith and Sustainability**

Person	Illustrative Statements on Faith and Sustainability
Jenn	At the end of the day my spiritual mantra is about being a good person, being honest, doing what is right (not just for me, not about selfishness). It’s about doing what is right in the bigger sense of things; for the future generations, the community. . . . It is really difficult to describe because it is not about tithing or following a religious set of tenets, it is more about this; whether it is ingrained or this instinctual. For me to be right in the world, I have to feel that my actions are right, that I am not harming others, and that I am actually doing good for others. . . . And I truly believe that in this world . . . the haves should help the have nots. I am not about the idea of private property or mine, mine, mine. That is kind of my way of being grateful. If I have time to give, I give it. If I have money to give, I give it. And I am not a nun; I

Person	Illustrative Statements on Faith and Sustainability
	am not going without... I'm not going to make this sound like I am some kind of Nobel Peace Prize winning Mother Theresa. But I think that all of us can do more... and I try to do as much as I can in that regard because I think, again, that's what right.
C.P.	A huge part of my Catholic Christian faith is [belief in] an incarnational God, so if that is true, that says something about the reality of this Creation that inspires me to want to care for it and see myself as part of it. . . . Incarnational in terms of relating that to the immanence of God rather than relating to only a transcendent God, so one who we see as revealed in the person of Jesus as God is also revealed in what is called the primary revelation, which is before Jesus, which is the natural world. So, the whole immanence and incarnation for me [is central]. It's like somebody said in a video, "Whenever a species is allowed to go extinct, it's like tearing a page out of scripture" which for us is like God. Of course you never take a Bible and just rip a page out, especially in public, yet in public we are able to let these species go extinct and not think anything of it. So what is that doing to this primary revelation? And, what would Jesus do? We have this living, breathing model in Jesus of the Divine, so that's what I am referring to.
Cal	[Religion is] as strong as ever and as important as ever. It is something that you do in life; it is your understanding of the world and theology, too, and everything else. It gets more content and is in continuing need of re-integration. When I was very small, I knew that creation wasn't a book. But I also knew that it was. Before we really had any ecology at all, it came for me about 1955 when Eugene Odum's first edition of <i>Fundamentals of Ecology</i> came out, somewhere in there. That was a new subject matter, but I was an ecologist already because it has to do with . . . In biblical study, if you are studying the Bible you talk about hermeneutics which is the business of interpretation of text and I was already doing that in the natural world in the reading of the book of Nature or the book of Creation. I didn't know the word then, but was doing the same sort of thing. You are working on interpretation. The natural world, in fact, the whole world, people included, the whole creation is something that can be read and the key here is coherence. Everything has to be coherent. Everything has to make sense with respect to everything else. The important thing is to realize that I believe life should be lived as a prayer and that meditation should not be separated. . . . Everything is prayer. And once and awhile I slip in this but you don't let that bow you down. Another way I think about it is living your life as a psalm, a psalm of praise. Just ask every step you take... obviously eventually this becomes part of your being... am I living like a psalm?
Joyce	[I was] raised with a different kind of currency that valued the ocean, the beauty of the natural world. Rather than pursuit of sustainability, it's more an avoidance of waste or hoarding: a recognition of gluttony or stealing from future generations. Religion framed an ethic and spirituality exists before that. Religion gives you some kind of theoretical framework for it. But religion did shape my ethics, my morality. Once I was in touch with Spirit, it kind of infused everything and that comes through in everything that you do. It needs to be grounded, integrated, and become

Person	Illustrative Statements on Faith and Sustainability
	really part of who you are. You recognize Spirit and you respect that and then you function in a more ethical way and you are not alone in this world anymore. What I am doing for me I am doing for others and vice versa. I do my best to do no harm. From an early age I realized that earth was part of my family. Gaia is really ... the sensibility that earth is being beaten or mistreated makes my heart cry. It is earth as thou.
Margaret	<p>I don't know if you've come across the expression of Panentheism – so, I mean you know, the earth has its own intrinsic value and although God cannot be contained or limited by the earth, God can't be separated from it. So, the presence of the Divine just permeates the planet. So, you know, from a spiritual perspective or a theological perspective, what are we doing? Thomas Berry talks about this from a cosmological perspective when he says that, you know, every being is a mode of expression of the divine. If you take a panentheistic approach, that to me fits right into it. What are we doing with the destruction; the extinction of species, the destruction of the forest, the ecosystems? There is nothing about the presence of the Divine. But it cannot be separated from the intrinsic worth of the planet. I don't know how else to say it. To me, everyone needs to be concerned about the planet I think for people of faith – when you understand this – it adds a whole other dimension to it. You know, I mean, Thomas talks about that in the future the first instinct of religious consciousness must be to save the planet as a voice of the Divine, which, once silenced will never be heard again.</p> <p>Thomas Berry says in one of his essays, it's about ... forget how he exactly talks about this whole awareness as being aware of... of being able to experience the presence of the numinous in the natural world and working for justice for the whole earth community... and so that is really what I feel. It has opened up to a working for justice for the whole earth community.</p>
Joel and Stephan	(S) Well, conservation is my creed. [Joel nods yeah.] (S) There is a real lifestyle change that must occur if you are going to pursue conservation. It is easy to talk heroically, but that's a lot of garbage because there is nothing heroic about what we are doing... I think you make some decisions for yourself....about where you want to be ... and those decisions mean you make changes and those changes are demanded about how you want to live. It's frustrating and anxiety producing at times, but it is an expression of yourselves and where you want to go. It's a path we've chosen. Yeah, there is a philosophy... conservation.
Jan	My basic statement [of faith] is I believe in God the father, son, almighty and the interconnectedness of the earth and creation.... it's quite a long thing I have written. I do find that choices I make all filter through that; it is who I am. It might be a discussion of global warming, but it is more about being good stewards of what is bestowed upon us by God the creator. And that, truthfully is the bottom line for me—stewardship ethic.
Rob	I really love the one quote that we had at the Quaker school that I went to... it was a George Fox quote; he was the founder of the Quaker religion, "Let your life speak" so and I just see that as a practice what you preach, live in a way if you want things to change, make sure you are doing it yourself.

Person	Illustrative Statements on Faith and Sustainability
Nancy	Jesus tells us we are to love our Lord with all our heart, mind, and strength and the way that we do it is to love our neighbor as ourselves and that is what we try to do. The way that we do that is by caring for the earth because that has huge impacts, especially on the least among us, on the poorest of our country and of the world and, as well, for future generations and people that we will never meet. . . . We ask ourselves two questions before we purchase anything or make any decision: (1) Will this thing or this decision bring us closer to God, and (2) will it help us love our neighbor. And, if you ask yourself those two questions over and over again, usually you don't make the purchase or you make a decision that puts you on the right track, so pausing to ask those questions.
Gail	I think like the bottom line of it would be the following of Christ, but not in the old form. Like Deepak Chopra has a new book out called <i>The Third Jesus</i> and he is making the distinction between the historical Jesus, the Jesus of dogma, and then the Jesus that is alive—the consciousness of Christ. So for me theologically, in my own research, Jesus was considered a wisdom master and he was called (in the old Aramaic) Ihidaia which means, the fused one, the unitive one. So, for my own self, following a master who was in the unitive consciousness and who was essentially saying, “If you are my disciple, you need to meet me where I am and become that in the world and I am here to help you transcend time and space.” We know that a master of that magnitude would transcend time and space so I have been following that master of wisdom and trying to open to the gift of that teacher so I can become that in the world even more. So I think that would be the deepest part of my underpinning. So this would be my core, the roots of my tradition, just go straight to the Master and become that.

### **Blending a New Way of Seeing (*Visio*) with Belief (*Assensus*)**

All of these role models have a broader and more encompassing worldview that embraces scientific understanding, ecological justice, and a strong sense of religious call. They also honor and integrate, sometimes revising and re-storying, religious tradition. They want to be clear they are “not doing away with any key elements of our faith” (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008). Rather, they are opening up their faith, “breaking it open” in ways that support their integrated faith and ecological calls. For example Sister Gail Worcelo shared how earlier symbolism of the Trinity expanded once she fully grasped the cosmological context of which she was part:

The Trinity is another Catholic image that has taking on new understanding and new realization after realizing the story of the Universe and applying it to the communion of subjects, not just as a concept but what we eat at the monastery, about animals—we don't eat animals—but what do we bring in and what is its effect on the community of life, the Divinity in the flesh of the world (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

Many of the actively religious role models see a significant part of their ministry to be this integration of belief with the New Story or ecological/cosmological worldview. Sister Margaret Galiardi offers workshops, retreats and has written about “cosmology as the context for theology.” Her recent book expressly addressed “the topic of the contemporary scientific understanding of the Universe and its implications for us as people of faith” (Galiardi, 2008, p. viii). She references Matthew 7: 21-23<sup>xxix</sup> as a challenge to readers to “ponder the question of just what it is that constitutes the way of living and acting that typifies true discipleship, not in an abstract historical time, but rather at *this* moment” (p. ix).

When they began their active turn toward sustainable lives, Nancy and Matthew Sleeth also sought spiritual guidance. They explored a broad array of religious texts but found the faith basis for their ecological call in the Bible. Specifically, at the beginning of their turn, they asked “Should we care this much about this issue?” As we saw in their profile, Matthew responded by turning to the Bible and exploring it in detail to discover all the ecologically oriented passages. As he read, he would underline the words, phrases, and stories that spoke of “our stewardship of nature,” finding that the extensive creation care messages led to a mostly underlined Bible. The Sleeth's belief led them to a new way of seeing and acting in the world. So important were the words of the Bible in framing their ecological conversion that Nancy and Matthew were instrumental in developing Harper's new *Green Bible* (Maudlin and Baer, Eds., 2008).

Exploring the range of beliefs that underpin a commitment to ecology and sustainability is a central aspect of Cal DeWitt's teaching and writing. He has published innumerable books

and articles that plumb faith as *Assensus* to encourage others to see and act differently. In all of his work, and in the witness of his lived life, the Bible is central, as his commitment to the “book of Nature”:

We know that over the centuries the Bible has been critically important to people who seek to live in love and obedience to God. The Bible’s importance continues today, not only for church and home, but (and this surprises many Christians and non-Christians alike) also for the environment. The Bible is hardly a minor contributor when it comes to providing advice on caring for creation. In fact, the Bible provides such powerful environmental teachings that it can be thought of as a kind of ecological handbook on how to rightly live on earth! (DeWitt, 1994, p. 39).

Two perspectives that integrate faith as belief and vision result, in part, from faith development to the Conjunctive Stage of Faith described earlier in this chapter. In particular, panentheism and adherence to a “two-book” theology pull together belief and perspective so the new view (i.e., the mandorla) is born at the center. Other important perspectives are Jesus as Model and Jesus as the Incarnation of God. For Christians, belief in and vision of Jesus are central in crafting a worldview.

### ***Jesus as Model and Incarnation***

Jesus, in his teachings and actions was a “social prophet” and “movement initiator” that protested the “economic and political injustice of the domination systems of their day,” (Borg, 2003, p. 91). In preaching the command to love your God, and to love your neighbor as yourself; to avoid worship of false idols; to live simply; and to avoid the sin of pride (Carroll, 1994), Jesus offered a road map to a simple and sustainable way of living. The historical life and teachings of Jesus influenced most of my research participants and altered their way of seeing and being in the world; they looked to Jesus as a model in his humanity and through his teachings. Almost all of the role models, for example, directly quoted or paraphrased Gospel teachings as the basis for their sustainability ethic.

Some also saw Jesus' life and death, especially the Passion of his death, as a metaphor for earth's suffering. Sister Gail Worcelo wrote that her formation occurred within the context of Thomas Berry's teachings on "the Passion of the gospels and the Passion of the human [as they] began to be extended to the Passion of the Earth." She came to understand that the "severe degradation of the planet, from simple physical assault, to disturbance of the chemical balance of the planet through petrochemical industries, to questionable manipulation of the genetic constitution of living beings by genetic engineering, to the radioactive wasting of the planet through nuclear industries" was "the place where Christ was suffering his present Passion" (Worcelo, 2000).

The last integration of belief and vision that I will illustrate relates to some of the role models' understanding of the Incarnation. This is closely related to the concepts of immanence and panentheism we described earlier in the chapter. However, the fundamental belief that God/the Divine is incarnated, or made material, on earth changes everything for some role models. C.P. relates an incarnational God to "the immanence of God rather than related only to a transcendent God." When one sees God this way, C.P. suggested that God not only is revealed in the "person of Jesus as God [but] is also revealed in what is called the primary revelation, which is before Jesus, which is the natural world." Therefore, destroying nature or allowing a species to go extinct, "is like tearing a page out of scripture, which for us is like God" (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008). You simply would not do it.

### ***Fiducia: Radical Trust***

Most of the role models consciously cultivated their relationship with Spirit and *all* maintained an intimate and deepening relationship with nature. These practices, as we will

discuss later in this chapter, helped them develop radical trust in the More. Three research participants demonstrate their radical trust by participating in an ancient and deep form of spirituality, the wilderness vision fast. These experiences are one way they listen deeply and endeavor to discern call: “I am going to the desert to fast and pray to find out what is required of me at this point in my journey” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 26). Role models are people who practice discernment, listen deeply to the “still small voice,” and usually respond to its call.

Borg (2003) used a metaphor from Kierkegaard to illustrate the concept of radical trust: “faith is like floating in seventy thousand fathoms of water. If you struggle, if you tense up and thrash about, you will eventually sink. But if you relax and trust, you will float” (as cited in Borg, 2003, p. 31). All of the role models, in their practices of discernment, blended personal will with radical trust. Stephan and Joel spoke of a time they surrendered with a simple prayer of “I need your help.” Sister Gail and others spoke of being “open.” Most of these role models experienced a felt knowing of Mystery at some point or often in their journeys—this inner knowing that is difficult to articulate with words, but is deeply felt, led them to trust. Gail described herself as a

a lights on person, meaning the experience of God has always been active and real. I have not been of the Apaphatic tradition, where there is darkness, like the Cloud of Unknowing. I have been through life someone who has access to the Mystery, somehow. I’ve been lights on. And in the mystical tradition of the tradition I would find the God image which is no image, something beyond limitation, so I wouldn’t have an image, like God is feminine, God is vastness, it would transcend that. But, I think what I am saying; it’s more experiential as real than as image... more of a felt sense. It’s just pervasive, it is there (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

Many come to believe this trust in Other is vital:

The way that you will continue on the journey is (1) believing in something bigger than yourself. I really don’t think it’s possible without that. And, you can call it God, or you can call it a higher power, I really don’t care what you call it—you can call it Allah, you can call it Yaweh—but, I don’t think it’s sustainable [without this], because we fall into

selfish habits all too easily. It has to be a conscious choice on a day-to-day basis to live for something bigger than ourselves. So it has to be, for me, the only way it can be sustained is by believing in something greater than ourselves and believing that the way we act out that love is through loving our neighbors. It's not possible for me to see a way of doing that without that core belief. And then secondly, you need to do it in community. If you feel like you are all alone, it is going to be very, very hard to sustain (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

### ***Fidelitas: Faithfulness***

This faith perspective is extremely important to my interviewees. Even those not presently active in church have internalized this ethical imperative and seek to live from it. They are exceptionally disciplined in their faith, and are guided by their internalized ethical imperative to “live right” according to the faith commandments of loving God (the Sacred) and neighbor (which includes all beings, earth, and cosmos):

And so, the thing that most supports me is my faith... that right makes might... and my conviction that in that faith, I must do my duty. And you can unpack this very much farther, because it can be faith that you should image God's love for the world, which is part of my faith—we should image God's love for the world. Also, faith that if you are faithful then at least things move in the right direction (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).

These role models demonstrate faithfulness in myriad ways: through their practices, service, and works; examples of these are provided throughout the dissertation.

One way the role models demonstrate faithfulness is through living their belief. This is described in part in the subsection “Alignment,” but faithfulness is about aligning their actions with their belief so that they can “live their belief” and become it. For example, Jan's basic faith statement describes her faithfulness: “I believe in God, the father, son, almighty and the interconnectedness of the earth and creation, but this is the way I filter all choices through: *It is who I am*” (J. Lorah, personal communication, December 10, 2007). Rob is guided by his Quaker

faith's founder George Fox and seeks daily to follow the call, "Let your life speak" (R. Schnabel, personal communication, December, 12, 2007).

As described under the earlier section "Alignment," these are people who have learned how to live from the "inside out rather than the outside in" (Buechner, as cited in Borg, 2003, p. 116). This inner place enables authentic decision-making from the heart instead of defaulting to choices motivated by external influences and/or driven by the false self. When they get to this place, it is a true conversion and the need for rules, laws, fall away:

One vow in the religious life, I vow to transform my consciousness for the sake of the whole and if that really happened and as that happens, the Rules of Life fall away. They are like from an old era, Rules, because when you have a transformed consciousness, you know how to behave, you don't need rules to; you know. So, you start from a whole other point and then you start moving forward in a new way. The Rules become unnecessary, so a lot of this stuff from the tradition formally, that some people still need, like some guidelines and strictures to follow, that is a conversion for me, in a recent way, of thinking. [It is like] oh, wait a minute, oh wow, all that I wrote and all that Rule of Life that I wrote I could take and throw because now I know that what it is, is that awakening into oneness. If we commit ourselves whole-heartedly to that, anyone who comes to us commits, wants that, not for their own sake, but for the community of life as a whole, if you give yourself totally to that, then behaving [sustainably]—one wouldn't have a conflict really. I mean because we are in this era, yeah, like "Do I get in my car," there's always going to be conflicts, but you walk the talk because you are in another realm. The consciousness wouldn't allow you to do something other. You would be there and from there you would go forward into even deeper ways of being and knowing the world. That's a conversion over for me, I think (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

## **Practice**

Central to the idea of *cultivating* ecological enlightenment and sustainable living is practice. Following a specific set of practices does not guarantee a turn toward earth, but it can prepare the ground for sustainability seeds to take hold. Borg (2003) summarizes this process in the context of spiritual transformation, but the same can be said for sustainability:

Being born again is the work of the Spirit. Whether it happens suddenly or gradually, we can't make it happen, either by strong desire and determination or by learning and believing the right beliefs. But we can be intentional about being born again. Though we can't make it happen, we can midwife the process. This is the purpose of spirituality: to help birth the new self and nourish the new life. Spirituality is midwifery (p. 120).

We can midwife the process. This commitment certainly is demonstrated through the lives of these role models. Each of them, in their own ways, became intentional and disciplined in their actions. They nourished (“midwifed”) their sustainable path through spiritual practice. Because of the integrated nature of their religious and ecological calls, they would say commitment to earth/ecological literacy and sustainability not only nourished but was an essential aspect of their spiritual practice.

In their efforts to lead fully integrated lives where their outer actions matched their inner values, each interviewee, in his or her own way adopted ways of evaluating choices and nurturing their paths. One could say that each adopted a life of discipline (of discipleship) that enabled them to “move beyond surface living into the depths” (Foster, 1998) of decision making supportive of an integrated sustainable life. For most, this way of moving “beyond surface living” entailed commitment to spiritual practice, especially commitment to deeply reflective practices and a conscious way of living. One role model considered it to be “development of the interior” and suggested that sustainability arises, “When you move into the heightened connection from the inner, you just have to... it just is... you don't have to even ask how to maintain it, it would be absurd to not. At that level, you couldn't not [be sustainable]” (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

Borg (2003) considers practice to be “the heart of the matter.” In his book *The Heart of Christianity*, Borg reminds us of Christianity's seminal teaching: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and

first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-40 as cited in Borg, 2003). Borg then asks what this means and how we do it. In a word, he suggests, “it means practice” and then explains: “Loving God means paying attention to God and to what God loves. The way we do this is through practice” (p. 187).

In response to an interview question about how humans can more effectively respond to our social and environmental responsibilities, teacher and activist Parker Palmer stated that spiritual formation/practice should play a primary role. To make his point, Palmer (1998) described spiritual formation as:

The process by which we reconnect with our own souls in a way that allows us to reconnect with that which is outside of us, which is other than us... When you’ve lost touch with that which is deepest within you and are living from some other place, there’s no way to connect with that which is authentic in other people, the natural world, the world of spirit. And therefore, there is no way to be responsible, no way to respond. But the important thing to note is that this inner journey, which spiritual formation is all about in all the great traditions, if it’s taken authentically doesn’t end inside yourself. You end up moving through that inner place to a place of outward reconnection (p. 57).

For most of the role models, spiritual practices did not necessarily sow the original seeds of sustainability, but practices nurtured them once planted. The vision quest was the one notable exception. It appears to be a practice that can radically transform.

Theologian Richard Foster, in his classic text *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, researched and synthesized the various disciplines (practices) comprising the spiritual life. Culling from scripture, classic texts and theological treatments, and the wisdom of his own Quaker tradition, he summarized over 12 different themes in three broad categories:

- Inward disciplines: Meditation, Prayer, Fasting, Study
- Outward disciplines: Simplicity, Solitude, Submission, Service
- Corporate disciplines: Confession, Worship, Guidance, Celebration.

Thirty years after its initial publication, Foster's book is still considered by many the best contemporary book on Christian spirituality. I use his framework as the basis for documenting the various spiritual practices that support and guide these sustainability role models.

The spiritual disciplines are "a way of sowing to the Spirit" (Foster, 1998, p. 7). For Borg (2003), they are a way of cultivating "thin places" (p. 149). The practices are a way of cooperating with Grace—the path of disciplined Grace (Foster, 1998):

The apostle Paul says, "he who sows his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:8). Paul's analogy is instructive. A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. This is the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines—they are a way of sowing to the Spirit. The Disciplines are God's way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within us and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing (pp. 7-8).

Spiritual practices sustain these role models on their pioneering, often counter-cultural journeys. Each recognized that maintaining "inner" sustainability is important to maintaining outward action and these role models use a variety of spiritual practices/disciplines to foster inner health, alignment, balance and wholeness. These support:

integration of head, heart, body, and not getting skewed off in any one aspect. Part of it is being able to do the focused work of the head, to open up to the work of the heart through meditation and prayer and those aspects of the life, and getting into the body through work or just things of fun like snowshoeing or tap dancing. So I find myself most sustainable when the whole thing is in alignment with itself. And so, whatever keeps me in alignment... meditation, the singing of the songs, ritual, liturgy, ceremony, being in community, continual input to help grow in the spiritual life through tapes and books and readings, and then the visual arts... like the visual aspects of the tradition and the material, like bread and wine; images of Mary, of the Trinity; images that have worked deep in my own psyche and spirit—they have their love; they've done their work in terms of understanding who we are and how to be (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

The role models lead deeply reflective lives, but do not always follow a structured approach to spiritual practice. Instead, they demonstrate Foster's (1998, p. 3) guidance that the "inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life" (Foster, 1998, p. 3). Rather than go to a class or attend daily worship services (although some might), they choose instead to "live life like a meditation or prayer" and prefer to be in nature (as a practice) rather than in a yoga studio or enclosed space. Joyce commented, for example, that "Earlier in my life [I practiced] sitting meditation, contemplation, sat sang" but that the "goal of that is not to be meditating, but to integrate it so that life is a meditation. [The] purpose of sitting meditation is to have it become a living meditation" (J. DiBenedetto-Colton, personal communication, November 15, 2007). She expresses that in many aspects of her current life, but commented specifically on gardening as a meditation.

Cal DeWitt shared a similar response. He suggested that from an ecological enlightenment and sustainability perspective, structured practices that keep a person indoors could actually be detrimental:

Yoga can actually be very detrimental because it can, for the urban person, put you into a room when you probably should be in nature. You are getting something similar, but nature, whatever you call it, nature is very important. There is no such thing as the absolute good thing to do. If you get up in the morning and you are praying for an hour in your closet that might not be good. If you are outside praying for an hour, that might be good. But you always have to be aware of those things. I think it is very important not to do things by rote, but always with good judgment and trying to do things with judgment, discernment, deliberate action and always being open to what is being said by the natural world because it tells a lot (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).

Participating in reflective practices on the land and interacting with nature, is one common thread that connects all of the role models. They might take it to different levels—some communing for extended periods of time in a vision quest ceremony and others merely pausing to express gratitude. All enjoy walking as a practice. Quite a few connect deeply with their

geographic places and came to know them very well. Other common practices are meditation, prayer, studying and writing, worship, and celebration. As mentioned before, but it is an attribute that cannot be overemphasized, they consider their sustainability practice and a commitment to simplicity as a vital spiritual practice. Their practices, which are a way of life, are so extensive that it is impossible to document all of them. I summarize some of the more prevalent practices shared in common among the role models, using Foster's (1998) organizational framework.

Some of the role models participated in practices outside of those summarized by Foster. Many of them considered gardening (typically they were referencing vegetable and native plant gardening) a form of spiritual practice. Also, several considered the arts of various kinds to be a vital part of their spiritual lives and supportive of their ecological and sustainability journeys. Jenn considered doing pottery and turning wood, both natural elements that connected her to earth, to be part of her reflective practice. Gail uses the arts, especially dance, to round out her more sedentary spiritual practices:

There are little smaller things that are personal, like learning how to celebrate this flesh [note: meaning her flesh] in food, with animals, with the natural world, or dance... getting physically into the body. I mean physically. I am a dancer. I've been a dancer so I've tried to cultivate staying in my body and part of the monastic rule and role is to "work and pray" – the "labora" has been fantastic for me. If I am too much in the head, I can feel my body go, "Come on, tug out the compost bins and trudge across the field with them..." Get back into the flesh.

Jan writes poetry, paints, plays guitar and sings, and does an array of fabric art. When I was visiting her she shared with me the "creation quilt" she made that now adorns one wall of her trailer. Others use labyrinths and/or create mandalas. Margaret found learning about the indigenous concept of the "Medicine Wheel" and the "practices emanating from it, such as 'The Prayer of the Four Directions' and 'The Medicine Walk,' to be foundational in re-building a sense of what it means to be human in the twenty-first century" (Galiardi, 2004, p. 40).

These are but a few examples of the creative ways these role models integrate spiritual practice into their daily lives. Further, many of these integrate the themes of religion, spiritual transformation, and sustainability.

## **Inward Disciplines**

### **Meditation and Reflection**

*“Christian meditation, very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word”*  
(Foster, 1998, p. 17)

Every role model had some form of meditative/reflective practice. It served multiple purposes:

- Supported conscious decision making
- Enabled them to see the whole, “think in big pieces”
- Helped nurture balance and inner sustainability
- Let them connect with all that is, in part by softening hardened boundaries and ego defense mechanisms (e.g., by peeling away the layers of the false self).

Some role models used formal meditation and all created opportunities to reflect throughout the day and to find time to be in nature:

I continually put myself into situations where I can reflect for long, long periods of time. Like now, for example, I am looking through a brilliant amaryllis onto a marsh which is starting to get red with Osier Dogwood, there is a squirrel in the tree, there’s a turkey feeding at the feeder and birds are flying in and out. The cranes are calling across the marsh. The nearest house is a quarter mile away and when we hang up, I will get another cup of coffee and just peer out over this marsh again and then go back to writing. I consciously do it, to put myself into situations where I am not distracted by trivial thoughts. I mean by trivial thoughts might even be things like meeting agendas—they might be very important thoughts, but things that really destroy your ability to think in big pieces. And then, when we moved here to Wisconsin in 1972, we very consciously selected a place on the landscape where every morning you could have refreshment of the landscape all around you; that leads to reflection. I have all of my students in my environmental science course and also in any other course I teach, I require that they

keep reflective journals and I teach them how to be reflective, I think that's very, very key (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).

The process of meditation and reflection is a time where role models “slow down and we allow something else to—it's like what we've experienced begins to ferment inside of us and I think that is critical” (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008). Some role models equate this as a way of making themselves available to the “Divine [that] is continually reaching out to us and we need to make ourselves available for that encounter” (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008). Integrating nature and meditation is key—“I think we can do that [make ourselves available for the encounter with Divine] by going outside, but I also think that there is a connection between some of the experiences, mystical experiences, if you will, that people have outside and the quality of their meditation. By quality of their meditation, I mean the mindfulness that they cultivate in moments of meditation” (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008).

A sampling of the range of possibilities for incorporating reflection and meditation into a life are shared by Jan; she weaves together silent and guided meditation, indoors and outdoors, to create a time to connect with God:

One of the things that I do for meditation. . . I mean, I can take it on several different levels. I have a meditation CD (orthodox worship service) that I listen to. And I do it in 3 different levels of involvement: (1) wake and grab the CD and while I am in the early morning hazy brain way; I listen to that and it really focuses me for the day; (2) I get out of the bed and I light incense and beeswax candles and my icons and I am actually present, more fully physically present. That is one of the things I love about the orthodox—it involves all of the senses one way or another; (3) and the third way that I do for a daily practice, not every day, but many, [is] I use the same materials and take it to the beach. I wear the head phones and I walk the beach and I listen to it and I feel comfortable enough that I can recite it out loud and it is powerful to put my feet in the sand or the water while at the same time I am involved in this meditation or worship service—I feel so connected to God and to the planet at the same time (J. Lorah, personal communication, December 10, 2007).

Many of the role models evoked walking as an important reflective practice:

I consider my walks meditation. For me, walking, and I swim, too—everything else is just blocked out; it's just breathing and talking to God. . . . It's a time to be alone, a time to be quiet, and the Bible says, "Be still and know that I am God," and I don't think that we can hear the voice of God if we have TVs on everywhere we go, radios, noise in our lives. . . . One of the things that we advocate for people is to try to spend at least 10 minutes in nature per day, where they can't see things that are made by man. It's hard to do, but it can be done (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

All of these practices are about pausing in order to listen deeply and connect with self and "Other." Some role models have revived the much forgotten practice of taking a day of quiet rest on the Sabbath, but a meditative practice in some ways offers an experience similar to Sabbath rest "because unless you come to rest, how can you resist those other messages? If we don't come to rest, and have something to look forward to every week, then how do you keep going?" (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008). Likening our lives to a run-on sentence, Nancy Sleeth (also an English teacher) highlighted the importance of the reflective spiritual practices (meditation, Sabbath); here she is referencing Sabbath, but the sentiment applies more broadly:

We are just one long run-on sentence. But, unless you have those periods and commas, and exclamation points, too, then how can you sustain anything? Certainly a life of giving to others and sacrifice—you fill the well back up. And the way the Lord taught us is to take one day off a week. It's the best gift, and we all say, "It's not worthwhile." By not obeying we are just doing ourselves a huge disservice (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

Reflective practice does not have to be complicated. Several role models tapped into the "thin places" of dawn and dusk with simple awareness:

My times of reflection have been through meditation and contemplation. These have been practiced "intentionally." However, I have found that my greatest and most regular reflection times have been in twilight – just before sleep and just after awakening. These are the times that I have most access to and awareness of inner or direct experience, and I am able to integrate this into my personal experience (J. DiBenedetto-Colton, personal communication, November 15, 2007).

Others maintained a practice of reflective gratitude:

The one thing that I do find, and again, I think it might stem from this idea of being grateful, I can be standing in the park, throwing sticks with my dogs or just enjoying this amazing day and I find myself stopping and just saying thank you, this is amazing—I've got the most wonderful dogs in the world, I am in this wonderful park in the middle of the big city, I walked here, it is a gorgeous day—look at the leaf color—it's an expression of gratitude. It's my own little private time with the big guy upstairs in whatever form he might be in, but yeah... I mean, it's not formal; it's not ritualized (J. Aiosa, personal communication, December 13, 2007).

Finally, reflection and meditation are not practices that attain meaning later in life, but are important throughout the course of a life. Rob began his turn toward earth, Spirit, and sustainability in part through the meditative practices of Quaker meeting he participated with at school during his adolescence:

I love the whole idea of Quaker worship. You sit in meeting. The Quaker meeting aspect of it. Not only the way everybody related to everybody on campus as a community to do different chores to keep the school going, but the meeting for worship was just a time where you basically sit in silence during meeting and if you feel moved to speak, you speak. And the whole Quaker idea that there is God in everyone and you don't have to have somebody—you are not going through a mediator to get to God, everybody is connected to God. But sitting there at meeting to worship and its like time stops still; especially as a teenager you are running nonstop and possibly worrying about things that on the big scale don't really have an impact. Everybody is so worried about them. Just a time to stop for me, to get grounded and to realize what is important. And, it is nice that you don't have someone preaching at you and telling you what to think, you just kind of sit back and think about what you've learned that day, how things are going, and it's just kind of a calming and grounding time. That had ... that's something I'll go to every now and have my own little meeting somewhere and often when I am in the field I'll have a little down time for a little bit if I am sitting eating lunch at a picnic table at a park, just have my own little moment of silence and relax (R. Schnabel, personal communication, December, 12, 2007).

## Prayer

Closely related to meditation is prayer. In form, prayer can be silent as in meditation, which is the most common form expressed by the role models, but verbal prayer also sustains some:

The Lord's Prayer, actually – "On earth, as it is in heaven." If I am going for a walk or am going swimming, I do short prayers. Sometimes it is just the Lord's Prayer or part of the Lord's Prayer or I just: "I breathe in, abide in me; breathe out, abide in you," or something like that or just a piece of scripture I read that morning. But prayer is part of... I feel like I am in prayer constantly now and that wasn't true, obviously, 10 years ago and, again, getting back to your question of "How do you sustain it?" We couldn't keep going without the prayer (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

Prayer is not just personal for some role models; something to be done as an individual. But it supports their deeply held commitment to community. When continuing her comments on prayer, Nancy Sleeth specifically mentioned the role of others; "having other people pray for us" is a critical way they maintain their far-reaching environmental ministry.

When Matthew comes into town [he travels extensively to spread the creation care word], he has two men—one is a Ph.D. student at the seminary and the other a professor at the seminary—and they get together and pray for about a half hour to 45 minutes. It happens about every two weeks. And then, I have a spiritual group of women, about five women and myself, and we get together on Saturday mornings to pray. So, that is part of my journey. That is part of what keeps me going (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

Simply put, "everything is prayer" (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008). Cal described the importance of this posture, especially evoking prayers of gratitude and praise:

Another way I think about it is living your life as a psalm, a psalm of praise. Just ask every step you take—obviously eventually this becomes part of your being—am I living like a psalm? And if you are not, you have to ask—I have to ask—well, why not? I am continually putting myself, to the extent that I am able, in places where continually living your life as a psalm is a possibility and when I find myself not doing it, I catch myself and say, "Okay, what do you need to do here... you'd better get up and walk around, step

outside, take a little walk”...in order to remind you who you are. We can easily convert ourselves into nuts and bolts and machines and I think that conscious meditation [and prayer] gets us out of that mode.

He concluded by saying that “if we can get into that mode [of meditating, praying, and living reflectively] in normal living, [well, it] means that our living will not be normal” (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008). Both of us chuckled at his statement, but it pointed to a truism shared by all of the role models. By living deliberately and incorporating meditation, prayer, and other reflective spiritual practices into their lives, they do not live “normally” according to the dominant U.S. cultural paradigm. Like Jesus, the quintessential historic role model for Christians, these role models are decidedly “counter-cultural.”

For these role models, prayer and ecological enlightenment go hand in hand. Prayer, in all its forms, softens and enlarges perceptual boundaries for some: “The deeper within I go in prayer, the farther I move out into the cosmos. Inner and outer become one” (Worcelo, 2005). For others, knowledge of cosmology and ecology deepens their sense of prayer:

I do remember at one point feeling like I was bringing more of myself to prayer and I was wondering what that was about, because now I know in my body, I carry all 13.7 Billion years. When that becomes conscious and when you bring that up... it’s a huge shift (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008).

## **Fasting**

Throughout history spiritual leaders have headed to nature for extended periods of solitude and fasting. While all of my research participants have deep connection with nature and routinely interact with the natural world in different ways, three of these role models were significantly influenced by extended fasts in a natural setting (i.e., they participated in a

contemporary vision quest). As described in her Chapter 4 profile, Margaret marked the vision quest at the threshold moment for her ecological enlightenment:

The Vision Quest shocked me into remembering that I need the natural world to perceive Holy Mystery. Indeed, without it, there is not spiritual life. . . . My vision quest experience affected a kind of ‘soul retrieval’ in me—a real re-mem-bering of the self—that changed everything. . . . I needed to pursue a more fundamental justice—a justice that seems to be foundational to every effort to create right relationships. We are an expression of the life of the planet. This, in turn, awakens the knowing that we are in relationship with everything and everyone that exists (Galiardi, 2004, p. 85).

Vision quests also were used by role models to support a deeper discernment around critical decisions:

Another moment that moved me into founding a new community was a vision quest that I took to clarify what I was feeling inside about this new community. So, I did a vision quest in the Utah Canyonlands and that was absolutely embodied—just the water fast and asking the question, “How am I to serve the world and what’s my gift?” And in the course of that vision quest it really was confirmed to keep going in this and begin the new founding (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

## Study and Writing

The role models deepen and support their journeys through ongoing learning and contemplation of the “two books” of theology (i.e., nature and Bible) and studying other resources about spiritual transformation. Reflection on the “books” is a form of *Lectio Divina* that is an ancient spiritual practice described in Chapter 3. While not all of the role models use the term *Lectio*, almost all of them read and study, reflect on, and contemplate the “Word.” Again, studying nature is considered by these role models to be part of studying the “Word.” Margaret, for example, wrote after spending a day alone in the woods while preparing for a more extended vision quest that she

felt a little like a child who had just completed her first reader, for in fact that was what I was learning to do—to read the revelation of the natural world. Something resonated

deep within as I began thinking of the Medicine Walk as the origin of *Lectio Divina* (Galiardi, 2004, p. 45).

These role models are forging a new way of *Lectio* that encompasses study and reflection of the written Word, but also the Word as revealed in nature, cosmology and contemporary science.

### ***The Word of Nature, Cosmology, Contemporary Science***

Cal DeWitt is exemplary in his commitment to place and models study as a spiritual path to knowing “home:”

We know all the animals and know all the ups and downs of the glacial drumlin and the town’s history of it and how it has been here for 10,000 years and how for the first 3,000 years it was spruce-fir forest and how later it was transformed into savannah and prairie and it is just very... that is another thing I do wherever I am. I go into great depths to study my place. Right now I am studying the sea that was located here prior to there being any green plants on earth and I am working out the shape of the sea bottom which is about 400-500 feet beneath me, and am trying to reconstruct the animal life of the sea bottom and then how that relates to deposits of muds and silts and how that’s shaping the formation of shale and sandstone and how that is shaping the supply of water to the surface through the springs and fens. I’m doing that for fun. That’s what I do. When I do that, I think of myself as a boy scientist—no big grant, no big research team. I have a little lab in the basement and I have this great wetland in the backyard. I can think deeply, I can pursue this. And I pursue it with the idea of coherence, right? I want to somehow make this inland sea, which was only 100-200 feet deep... I want to somehow make this cohere with the wetland I know. It’s really fun (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).

Going to “great depths” to study place, whether home place, specific natural places, watersheds and bioregions, and/or the cosmos is a eco-centric spiritual discipline for most of the role models.

### ***The Written Word***

Each role model has a considerable practice of reading, learning, reflecting, and writing. Often, the Word studied is the Bible, but also includes key environmental writers and thinkers and actors like Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme and Miriam MacGillis, Rachel Carson, and key theologians and the works of the mystics. Earth/ecological literacy is a topic commonly pursued.

The practice of writing is a form of reflection but also a way of returning the gifts from their journey and reaching out to others. Many of the role models spend time leading retreats and worship services, teaching and preaching, and writing. Several of the role models have taught and published on theology and use the Bible to make the case for creation care and ecological sustainability. They are extraordinary students and teachers who integrate multiple forms of inquiry into a new way. Three themes tend to be emphasized in their works:

- Their personal journeys to ecological enlightenment and sustainability
- The theological underpinnings of environmental responsibility and/or the integration of ecology, cosmology, and theology
- Practical suggestions for leading a more sustainable life.

### **Outward Disciplines**

Through their daily lives and actions each role model demonstrates the outward discipline of simplicity and service. They have embodied Mary Evelyn Tucker's call to "imagine and create other possibilities for human life":

The alternative voices of the religions are needed, then, to imagine and create other possibilities for human life besides the accumulation and consumption that undermine fragile ecosystems and deplete natural resources. Surely religions in their postmodern phase can inspire larger aspirations for our place and purpose in nature than simply economic exploitation. The question arises: is the Earth a commodity to be bought and sold or a community of life that invites participation? (Tucker, 2003, p. 18).

In different ways, all role models consider "a different kind of currency" (J. DiBenedetto-Colton, personal communication, November 15, 2007) that values nature and community. They have clearly shifted to a "postmodern" perspective, where earth is viewed with wonder as numinous revelation and where service and daily action is respectful and participatory. Their service is in

the direction of the earth and broad-based ecological justice; “working for justice for the whole earth community” (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008). They see this as their service to God. Each demonstrates simplicity and would score well on the traditional measures such as the ecological footprint quiz. Examples of their commitment to simplicity and service are illustrated in Chapter 4, in each informant’s biographical sketch.

Another outward practice is one of solitude. Each role model finds moments of solitude, mostly through taking conscious moments, “pauses” throughout the day, walking, gardening, and through retreats of various sorts:

- A Catholic Priest has a practice “of living by myself in a Hermitage, trying to opt out a bit from being totally enmeshed with the Oblate local community, the seminary, that’s not into this... being able to have some distance from that” (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008).
- I do make an annual retreat, but the Vision Quest has totally ruined me. We used to go to retreat houses, but [makes face indicating “yuck”] I can’t go to retreat houses anymore. I am always looking for where can I go to be on the land. I can’t do a traditional retreat in a chapel anymore (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008).
- Another seeks retreat at a one-room, off-grid cabin associated with the Narrow Ridge Earth Literacy Center and community in Tennessee: “I have a clear light at the end of my tunnel because we’ve created a space where we will not be participating in the waste—our cabin is hand pumped, not electric—olive oil lamps, composting toilet, hand pump for water—what else do we need?” Presently, “There are two times of the year, 2-4 weeks in summer and a week in the fall, [when] we go to the simple cabin and that is a spiritual retreat for me.”

Some role models have so strongly integrated their spiritual and day-to-day lives that practice becomes the life. In referencing his home on the marsh, for example, Cal DeWitt commented, “This is not my retreat, it is my life.”

## **Corporate Disciplines**

The corporate spiritual disciplines include worship and celebration. These sustainability role models share a strong practice of celebrating creation although they do so in different ways. Many are leading the way in creating new ceremonies and rituals that update traditional approaches and provide them with an ecological and cosmological focus. Often they design and lead worship services and other ceremonies. Sometimes this includes adding new approaches to a traditional service and often it includes creating something entirely new. They are not confined by dogma and doctrine and create new forms while honoring what has come before. Often, their approaches seek to enlarge the perceptions of others and awaken them to an eco-centric perspective. The study, preparation, and delivery of retreats, sermons, and entire services deepens these role models in their own journeys and commitments:

Certainly when we preach, not exclusively, but much of the time we preach on the life of Jesus and that model he presents for us. He wasn't preaching about the [Universe] Story or ecology, but he was kind of preaching about sustainability and the way of relationships with other humans and with the Divine, so I am able to build on that in the preaching part of the mass as John Sorrette [a Jesuit mentor to C.P.] told me back in 1996 that he is able to weave in matters of ecology or the Story in his preaching. I find that enlivening and a creative outlet and a real opportunity because people are coming to Mass to be fed and in the tradition of Jesus expanding the perceptions of his followers. If I can invite myself as well as those I am in mass with to expand their perceptions about preaching, that's an enlivening part for me (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008).

Well you know how central ritual is to Catholic life. We created this Holy Week retreat where we took those kind of staid rituals and we re-did them in a way that was faithful to the tradition but brought a whole new life to them. You know, I think I am in the role of ... I don't find it in the formal rituals of the church or whatever; it is the stuff I do, the stuff I invent, the ceremony I create. Yeah, it is an expression of ... it gives expression to the state of your soul, I think. So, I find that helpful... So, it becomes harder and harder for me to tolerate religious rituals or experiences which have no connection with the plight of the planet... it's just like...and when they are integrated and they are connected, it feels so congruous, it feels so right... it is like your whole body is in alignment with the universe; it just hums (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008).

We are constantly leading worship services that have to do with creation care, so obviously hymns and praise songs and the whole worship service is having to do with creation care is a big part of our lives, so for us helping to lead and helping other people to plan those worship services is something we do on a regular basis (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

### **A Note on Struggle**

An early reviewer of my work inquired about the role of struggle in these role model's journeys. This was an excellent, probing comment that caused me to pause and reflect more deeply on my interactions with each role model. Truly with each conversation I was struck with how open, gracious, passionate, and alive each person was. They did not convey the burnt out nature and exhausted demeanor of many I have seen who have struggled, or that I know for myself through my own struggles. Instead, as I mentioned earlier, they seemed imbued with the "fruits of the spirit" of which include love, joy, peace, kindness, fidelity, gentleness, goodness, patience, and self-control (Keating, 2000).

This is not to say their journeys were without struggle—the turn to a sustainable way of life is challenging and each role model, in his or her own way, encountered the "road of trials" (Campbell, 1973). In reviewing their stories and developing the profiles it was clear to me that many of the role models have experienced significant struggles. Yet some sort of transformation occurred for each of them through the course of the struggles that opened their hearts and perceptions instead of closing them. When I asked a couple of them about the notion of struggle as it related to their sustainability journey, they responded that their actions were motivated by love, or they were doing from a place so connected with the numinous, that struggle was transformed. Gail specifically commented about how acting from an aligned place with deep connection to the Divine through practice was "always replenishing. . . . In that space there is

never fatigue, there is always a freshness, a newness” (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

The sense of transformative energy that arises from being in alignment with true call is consistent with a major finding from Daloz et al. (1996). They discovered in their research “very little sense of sacrifice among those [they] interviewed,” instead noting that most spoke of the “deep gladness” with which they did their work—work that they love, that is their purpose, that drives them, and makes them happy (Daloz et al., 1996, p. 197). Using words that matched almost verbatim those from some of my research participants, Daloz et al. (1996) illustrated how aligning with a deeper call that is driven by love and “deep gladness” transforms the action to an internalized way of being that becomes “as simple as ‘you can’t *not* do it’” (Daloz et al., 1996, p. 197). The fire of struggle is transformed by passion:

The numinous fire that burns in those stars has burned through thirteen billion years of Universe unfolding, and burns in me this morning. It burns in my hunger for the Holy. It burns in every leaf, animal, and stone. It is the Fire within the fire of all things (Worcelo, 2005).

Like all fires, the fire within ebbs and flows. Role models do get tired, lose focus, feel despair, and encounter ongoing struggles. However, for these Christian role models, the breath of their faith and the bellows of their practice reignite the embers. The findings from Daloz et al. (1996) again affirm my observations—“times of uncertainty, doubt, even despair . . . are real, and they lodge in the hearts of those we interviewed. But they seldom take center stage in the inner dialogue, and when they do, they don’t prevail for long” (p. 200).

## **BUILDING AND NURTURING COMMUNITY: YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE**

The element of community was not part of Foster's spiritual discipline framework, but it is a vital part of being Christian and a vital part of each role model's life. Each person said in his or her own way, "we can't do it alone." This was a key take home message for me. Each was deliberate in his or her efforts to build and nurture community. They acknowledged receiving sustaining support from their faith, but also expressed the need to collaborate with others:

You need to do it in community. If you feel like you are all alone, it is going to be very, very hard to sustain. I think that unless you have friends who are committed to the same path—it doesn't matter where they are on the journey, they don't have to be in the same place as you—but unless you have friends for the journey to encourage you it's going to be very, very hard. It's much easier to not be accountable and to fall back into old habits or to fall into what the vast majority of American society is telling us: the me, me, me, I deserve it message. That is the overwhelming message that we receive. So in order to have the strength to continue, I think you need to believe in something bigger than yourself and to have the help of friends. We can't do it on our own (N. Sleeth, personal communication, March 12, 2008).

The role models have learned from others and shared with others (e.g., been part of and started study groups, developed a support group of "Earthy Oblates," pulled together friends to share a CSA membership). Each has a strong ethos of community and a sense of accountability to their community:

I really got that this guy (Jesus) had a message about how we could live together in community. I was studying it, reading it, trying to translate it for the kids, and then someone came along and said, let's just buy it from *Living the Good News*, but I remember that I kind of mark that experience as "ah, that's why I go to church... that's what this what I am supposed to be about... But Jesus did not do it for ecology... he did it for community (J. Hill, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

An Orthodox friend said you really need to make a choice about where you are going to live because you really need to be accountable to a community and I thought about that and I recognize that he is right about that. Living alone is really quite wonderful but you need to have a sense of accountability not only in your faith, but in everything else that you do and it was then that I realized that this is where I live and I really respected him for taking that bold step for saying "you got to make a choice." You can't live with your

feet in both sides of the water, you have to choose with whom are you going to be accountable; and I thought that was very well stated. And, he's also very involved with the Northwest Earth Institute work [i.e., ecological and sustainability study circles] and recognizes all the connectedness between our environmental sustainability issues and our faith things and so I thought that was really powerful because he was speaking of me not just in terms of where I am living and knowing my neighbors, but all respects to be accountable (J. Lorah, personal communication, December 10, 2007).

Sharing with others helps to clarify and set intention; offers opportunities to share stories and struggles, prayers and hopes; practically fosters the sustainability ethic of sharing and borrowing things; provides hands on and emotional help for the journey; and encourages accountability. In a simple summary phrase, Jan shared the role community and sharing with others had for her journey—"that helped shape me regards who I am and where I am going" (J. Lorah, personal communication, December 10, 2007). The most independent voice was Stephan Hill who also recognized the vital importance of community:

If I had to do it over, knowing what I now know, I would still want to go off grid with the solar and the wind... but one of the things I've learned, the wave of the future... what will be important... is to be in community where you have the where-with-all and the big single problem we have is to have to drive miles and all that gas, so the support that I am trying to identify would be to locate to a place where we could live a more sustainable way of life, like an ecovillage, but I am not a person who is necessarily comfortable living in community in close proximity to others. I am a pretty private person.... The idea of living in close community is not overly appealing to me, but I think that is the direction we need to go as a country; to find places where we can live together that will accommodate a variety of lifestyles but also provide things like mass transportation, grocery stores, and the where with all to live and sustain ourselves (S. Hill, personal communication, November 14, 2007).

All of the role models cherish, nurture, depend on, and build community. Creating community is one way they bring back and share with others the gifts from their journey. The examples of how they engage in community are too numerous to summarize, but some include:

- Starting and participating in Creation Care and prayer groups
- Introducing various sustainably focused study circles (sponsored by the Northwest Earth Institute, but available around the country) in different communities

- Being an engaged member of a religious community and offering earth literacy and other community learning opportunities to others
- Getting active in a neighborhood parks association
- Co-founding a community-focused educational organization (i.e., the Au Sable Institute)
- Mentoring local Watershed Organizations
- Starting a local chapter of EarthSave International and offering organic gardening and vegetarian cooking classes
- Growing and distributing food for local food pantries.

Each role model recognizes that the path of ecological enlightenment and the commitment to sustainability leads to others and each noted repeatedly in our interviews how essential community was to their journeys.

## **INFUSED WITH GRACE AND PERSONAL CONVICTION**

In response to the question “What about your journey has allowed you to make that shift when so many others struggle?” several role models evoked the ineffable and impossible to describe with words. Margaret expressed the sentiments of many others when she responded, “I’m tempted to throw your research in havoc by answering ‘Grace’” (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008).

The role of Mystery or Grace in supporting enlightenment, ecological or otherwise, cannot be overstated. Each role model arrived at a critical moment, a crossroads, in their lives and chose to take the “less traveled way.” Often they arrived with others who had similar backgrounds, but chose not to step across. Gail, for example, commented that she had “thought about this same question, because as that [commitment to live into the Ecozoic Era] broke open in myself, it didn’t break open in the community I lived in; nowhere near the extent in which it

happened in me and there were other men and women in the classes that we had from him [Thomas Berry] and there wasn't another man or woman in the Passionist community at the time who took it up and said, 'Wow, this is the way I am going in the future.'"

There is not a single, simple, or straightforward formula one can follow, or that the Chesapeake Bay Program (or any other entity) can employ, to cultivate ecological enlightenment. However, Borg (2003) reminds us that we can "midwife" the transformational process and each role model was intentional in doing so. "Midwifery practices" are something that can be cultivated and encouraged. Chapter 6 explores more about how individuals and religious and environmental organizations can do this. Theologian Martin Smith considers our lives to be a process of "co-creating with God." Eco-depth psychologist Bill Plotkin (2008) stated throughout his book on *Nature and the Human Soul* that "our conscious cooperation with grace makes all the difference [and that] learning to cooperate consciously with grace—as individuals and as a species—is one of the essential elements in our current evolutionary opening" (p. 28). He provides innumerable practices and tasks to support this cooperation.

Through their commitment to authenticity, practice, discernment, and service to Spirit and nature, each role model cultivates this cooperation and recognizes the partnership element of it. Their journeys are not a passive waiting for "Other" to act, but result from the blend of intention, personal will, and Grace. Schauffler (2003) discovered that "conversion . . . cannot be choreographed. The process happens through a fortuitous mix of choice and chance, when 'will and grace' are joined" (p. 9). C.P. exemplifies this co-creative partnership in reflecting on his journey to develop an ecological learning center:

I guess it's kind of what Miriam [MacGillis] was saying in that the Universe will provide. I've never seen myself as an organizer or a director of anything; I had never been a pastor or like a director of a retreat center, so to come into this role without that

experience, and be able to pull off what has happened with our ecological initiative—you could call that Grace. Or, you could call it stubbornness, or focus, or whatever you want to, but I guess all those things work together. But Grace would be part of that—the language of the Universe providing (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008).

Thomas Berry and others (e.g., Plotkin, 2008) consider the critical moment referenced in the preamble to the *Earth Charter* to be a “moment of grace” because what can appear to be potentially catastrophic may also be immensely creative. At the crossroads, the way is opened for creative and courageous travelers. Each role model profiled in my dissertation is such a traveler. By stepping across the sustainability threshold and moving more deeply into the journey instead of turning back like so many others, they were rendered more “porous and permeable” (Fowler, 1995, p. 198) and experienced “thin places” (Borg, 2003, p. 149) where the sense of separation between human and “Other” (nature and Divine) vanishes. Some became or are becoming thin places for others. In a permeable landscape life giving water is able to soak into the ground and nourish roots and replenish underground streams. Likewise, permeability in a person enables the felt sense of connection to “Living Waters.” Whether the person calls them creation and Creator, the numinous matrix of Mystery, emerging Universe, Source, Field, or some other name, the psycho-spiritually mature person communes at a different level, where inner and outer are one (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008):

I find that when the inner condition is sustainable then I myself become a vessel for what needs to happen to arise because there is not stuff in the way—whether fatigue, over work; what we talked about before. It’s a different way of being, from the inside, and then something else happens in the outside world. People or things come into the picture, it’s not of my doing, it’s not forced (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008).

From this “open-hearted” (Borg, 2003) place, “Grace is just pouring out all the time” (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008).

## **CHAPTER 6. RETURNING TO THE CONFLUENCE:**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

The wall of my home office is adorned by a satellite image of the entire 64,000 square mile Chesapeake Bay basin. The image clearly shows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains tracking from the northern most limits of the basin near Cooperstown, New York south into my birth state of Virginia. The Shenandoah Valley of Virginia, home to nine generations of my family, appears in the western reaches of the basin. There, I can see the Shenandoah and Potomac Rivers of my youth. And while the scale of the image prevents me from actually seeing this on the photograph, my mind's eye is able to trace both rivers to their sources in the highlands. As my eye wanders across the Virginia border into the most far western reaches of the Chesapeake Bay basin in West Virginia, I wonder if new imagery will show the scars of mountain top removal. The image I have, taken in 1987, precedes that egregious form of landscape blasphemy, but visibly shows the change in tributary clarity as clear streams leave the mountain regions and pick up sediment and other pollution on their way to the Bay, becoming muddy sloughs at the mouth.

The Chesapeake Bay is choking under escalating nutrient and sediment loads primarily from rapidly increasing populations and poor land use planning to accommodate the influx of people; extensive land conversion from farms and forests to impervious commercial, residential, and business development (i.e., sprawl); poorly managed industrial agriculture; and inadequate wastewater treatment. The very conditions that are degrading the Chesapeake Bay Watershed are fueling the mountaintop removal of coal in the western Appalachian reaches (described in Chapter 2) as McQuaid (2009) discovered while electronically processing his expose' on the

topic; the threads of connection from his suburban Washington, D.C. office traced up the Potomac River into the Appalachian Highlands and beyond.

After years of living in, studying, and working to preserve and restore the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, I reached a crossroads similar to the one prompting the *Chesapeake Futures* report (Boesch and Greer, 2003) and came to the deep realization that current efforts were simply not doing enough; that we could not study, educate, monitor, model, regulate, or negotiate ourselves out of the problem, or find a technological fix—something more was required. I became seized by the underlying recommendation and question of the *Futures* report—how do we cultivate the [ecologically] enlightened citizen? To me, this question framed the essence of my own feelings as a passionate, yet frustrated, environmental professional and watershed citizen. It fueled my research inquiry. Unlike the *Chesapeake Futures* authors, I did not “leave such larger questions about the character and impact of change to the sociologists and other students of the future” (Boesch and Greer, 2003, p. 20). Instead, I shifted my gaze from a geomorphology and environmental policy and planning focus to a new direction and journeyed into the knowledge watershed to seek answers. I gathered tributaries of wisdom from many different sources, especially individuals who are ecologically enlightened and committed to sustainability. Using grounded theory methods, I gathered these tributaries at the confluence to identify key themes (Chapter 5) and to present a summary and recommendations in this final chapter. This chapter looks back over the key findings presented throughout the dissertation and brings them together to propose some new ways forward. The chapter is arranged in the following subsections:

- Key Findings
- Confluence

- Recommendations
- Next Steps and Future Research
- Final Words.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

### **Role Models Experienced a Transformational Moment and Journey**

Each role model arrived at a “critical moment,” a crossroads, in their lives and chose to take the “less traveled way.” Their courage to undertake this counter-cultural journey is a key characteristic of these people. Most role models, through practice and discernment, sought the call. Even if it came unbidden, all of the role models responded once they heard. Some were “born in the groove” and experienced a deepening ecological enlightenment and commitment to sustainability when they encountered “avarice published on the landscape” (C. DeWitt, personal communication, March 10, 2008) or had the opportunity to set up their own home and/or teach others. Others had different starting points and more dramatic shifts prompted by life crisis or some other kind of conversion experience. All of them experienced a transformational moment and/or journey that clarified their intention and honed their commitment; rather than turning back or pretending not to hear, each role model stepped across the threshold with disciplined action when they heard the call to greater ecological commitment.

By responding to the call to journey, the role models transformed to a deeper and more expansive psycho-spiritual maturity beyond that of their peers. In stepping across the threshold and moving more deeply into the journey instead of turning back like so many others, they were rendered more “porous and permeable” (Fowler, 1995, p. 198) and experienced “thin places” (Borg, 2003, p. 149) where the sense of separation between human and Other (nature and

Divine) vanishes. Some became or are becoming thin places for others. On their journeys, most encountered “the road of trials” and rather than becoming hardened, or turning back to the more comfortable norm, the role models were both honed in intention and made more porous and permeable in outlook and outreach. They achieved conjunctive faith (Fowler, 1995), where opposites are united and either/or becomes both/and. I consider this to be mandorla consciousness; the key of the religious journey to “bind together” that which was split apart (Johnson, 1993). Role models occupy the space in the middle.

By shedding the often huge “cloak of conditioning” (Williams, as cited in Schauffler, 2003, p. 27) and experiencing other transformational events leading up to the threshold and on the road of trials, the role models matured through the journey beyond the narrow, yet culturally predominant and promoted view of self interest, to a more encompassing perspective. They became capable of “living from the inside out rather than the outside in” (Buechner, as cited in Borg, 2003, p. 116) and “letting their lives speak” (R. Schnabel, personal communication, December, 12, 2007, paraphrasing George Fox). They have the capacity to look backward and forward while standing firmly rooted in the present. Role models become “trees of life” with vertical alignment and horizontal reach, solid roots and wide outstretched branches. These are “deep” people, reflective and rooted in their faith and practice. As such, they have a stable base from which to spread their reach in “ever widening circles.”

### **Role Models Practice Discernment**

All of the role models saw their religious/spiritual commitments as inextricably intertwined with their call to ecological enlightenment and sustainable action. This was

not just an intellectual knowing, but was a felt, embodied knowing. All gave their lives to something bigger than themselves and live a life of service.

The practice of discerning call is a vital part of their spiritual lifestyle. Since they view their ecological and spiritual/religious calls as intertwined (“calls within calls”), the act of discerning call extends from the conventional notion of listening to God (Farnham et al., 1991) to include listening to the earth and to what is ecologically responsible. The personal practice of discernment integrates intuitive, affective, and imaginal knowing with the intellectual resources of study. Because of the integrated nature of their calls, the posture of deep listening that characterizes discernment has led these role models to take on the vocation of sustainable living.

Once the role models discerned their ecological call as part of their religious/spiritual call, they established an intention and made a conscious effort to shape their whole life to support the growth of this commitment.

### **Role Models Experience Alignment**

Each role model experienced a coming together of the heart and head, cognitive and relational/affective ways of knowing. A third step of embodiment aided the transformation to role model status. Alignment involved developing a relationship (heart-opening relationship) with the natural world and Spirit in addition to cognitive learning/understanding about ecological crisis and sustainability. It does not seem to matter in what sequence it occurs, but role models’ hearts and minds need to be integrated as two ways of knowing before the shift occurred. More so, it appears that the intention and commitment to live ecologically enlightened and sustainably must be “concretized in the flesh” (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008) before the integrated heart and mind roots take lasting hold. Each role model had an opportunity to

integrate their passion and knowledge with a bodily experience whether a restoration project, vision quest, starting an organization, making a creation quilt, or some other earth/Spirit-centered “hands on” project.

Role models also achieved greater authenticity through the course of their journeys so that alignment occurred between their inner thoughts, feelings, and words, and the outer deeds they performed in the world.

### **Role Models Have Broader Perceptions**

Role models achieved ever wider and deeper circles of identity; the spiritual and sustainability journey supported shifting centers of gravity and influence so that their perspective is broader than the typically characterized individualistic, “me first,” anthropocentric orientation that is the predominant western orientation (McFague, 2008). They have, as Mary Evelyn Tucker suggests, re-centered their lives “within, not apart from, the myriad species with whom we share the planet” (Tucker, 2003, p. 10). Furthermore, they have re-centered their lives within a broader concept of neighbor, and to varying degrees place themselves within an ecological, cosmological, or mystical/universal worldview. They understand their places and the “depths to which [they] belong” (M. Galiardi, personal communication, January 9, 2008), recognize that their “ancestry includes all forms of life, all the stars, the galaxies, even the fireball at the heart of time” (Worcelo, 2000), and have experienced to varying degrees “constructive, enlarging engagement with the other” (Daloz et al., 1996) which helps them experience empathic connection with the other, whether nature, people, and/or Divine. Ever widening circles of identity are vital for developing ecological enlightenment and sustainable action through creating empathic connection to the “other” but also because broader perceptions enable role models to

hold the perspective of deep time and the capacity to understand and evaluate life cycle “costs” of material choices. They extend the practice of sustainability to the inner realm and outwardly to ecological citizenship. These are engaged citizens *and* they take care of themselves.

### **Role Models Have Matured to Conjunctive Faith Stages and Beyond**

During the course of their journeys, each role model “left home” to an Individuative-Reflective Stage of Faith (Stage 4) and further matured into a Conjunctive Stage of Faith (Stage 5) and beyond (Fowler, 1995). They moved beyond the dichotomous perspective that characterizes earlier faith stages and are able to hold the tension of, and create new forms from the space in between, apparent opposites. This is a vital transformation. I call this the place of mandorla consciousness (per Robert Johnson, 1993, who considers the mandorla to be the way we “transfer from a cultural life to a religious life”). Mandorla consciousness enables the role models to “retrieve, re-evaluate, and reconstruct traditions” from the “creative place in between” (Tucker, 2003):

- Old Story and New Story; revisioning and restorying as needed for an ecological age
- Past, present, and future
- Emergent Christianity
- Panentheism
- Two-book theology
- Science-ecology-religion: A panentheistic perspective and/or consideration of a two-book theology supports a viewpoint of integrating science (ecology) with religion and faith. This ability to integrate perspectives is an important attribute that all role models share—science and religion are considered compatible and they integrate perspectives of both in their religious and ecological worldviews.

- Calls within calls: Conjunctive faith/mandorla consciousness brought together environmental and religious sensibilities in the role models. What was born from the place in the middle, the mandorla, was the commitment to serve God and nature, Creator and creation; this was the development of calls within calls.
- Bridges between faiths, between science and faith, and with others (like environmentalists).

All of them live this integrated perspective in their daily lives.

### **Role Models Live Their Faith and Practice**

Four foundational theological and faith perspectives underlie most of the role model's commitment to sustainability:

- Most adhere to the tenets of the “emerging paradigm” of Christianity (Borg, 2003)
- They follow a two-book theology where the sacred word is revealed through nature and the Bible
- Each had a panentheistic perspective and understood the deep connection between “Creator and created;” therefore, being centered in Spirit involved being centered in an ecological worldview.
- They looked to Jesus as a role model (especially as revealed through his Gospel teachings) and through his Incarnation.

Most of the role models consciously cultivated their relationship with Spirit and all maintained an intimate and deepening relationship with nature. They demonstrate faithfulness through practice, service, words, and works. This relates to alignment—they live coherent lives from the “inside out.”

Practice is a way of life for most of the role models. Also, the notion of practice for these role models integrates religion, spiritual transformation, and sustainability. Sustainability as a practice among these role models has many faces, but shares the common threads of

commitment, discernment, focus (intentionality), mindfulness, and creativity (they make it work where they are regardless of life circumstances).

The role models lead deliberate and reflective lives, but do not always follow a structured approach to spiritual practice. Instead, they demonstrate Foster's (1998, p. 3) guidance that the "inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life" (Foster, 1998, p. 3). Yet, they use a number of different practices as "a way of sowing to the Spirit" (Foster, 1998, p. 7). These include:

- Reflective practices on the land
- Walking as a practice
- Sustainability as a practice
- Ecological learning as a practice
- Knowing place as a practice, and
- A variety of inner, outer, and corporate spiritual disciplines (Foster, 1998).

For these role models, spiritual practice, ecological enlightenment, and sustainable action go hand in hand.

### **Role Models Cultivate Community**

Each role model said in his or her own way, "We can't do it alone." All of the role models cherish, nurture, depend on, and build community. Creating community is one way they bring back, and share with others, the gifts from their journey.

### **Role Models Cooperate With Grace and Exert Personal Will**

All of the role models, in their practices of discernment, blended personal will with radical trust. Most follow the path of “disciplined Grace” (Foster, 1998). Their paths are not without struggle and yet there is a sense of transformative energy that arises from being in alignment with true call. This is consistent with a finding from Daloz et al. (1996). For these Christian role models of ecological enlightenment, the breath of their faith and the bellows of their practice and their will reignite the embers of their fire whenever they grow low.

### **CONFLUENCE: A PRELIMINARY THEORY ON CULTIVATING THE ECOLOGICALLY ENLIGHTENED CITIZEN**

In Chapter 2, I used the metaphor of confluence to describe the converging voices of science, religion, and environmentalism coming together in an array of calls to “cultivate the [ecologically] enlightened citizen” (Boesch and Greer, 2003) and foster sustainability. My satellite photo of the Chesapeake Bay Basin provides a visual reminder of this metaphor. I see not only tributaries of water coming together on their journey to the mouth of the Bay, but I see tributaries of wisdom originating from different sources yet converging into a new course. The role models I profile in this dissertation are some of the explorers and pioneers navigating these converging ways. They are not only navigating new ways, but are themselves the confluence of religion, science, and environmentalism. The grounded theory methodology provided an excellent way to map the wisdom tributaries offered by the role models, through the process of identifying and sorting themes; primary and secondary codes come together at the confluence as theory.

In presenting this preliminary theory I evoke the wisdom of psychologist Erik Erikson (as cited in Fowler, 1995)—“We must take our theories with a serious playfulness and a playful seriousness” (p. xiii). There is not a single, simple, or straightforward formula one can follow, or that the Chesapeake Bay Program (or any other entity) can employ, to cultivate ecological enlightenment and sustainable action. However, Borg (2003) reminds us that we can “midwife” the transformational process. To consider how to do this, it is helpful to hone in briefly on the “critical moment.” Each role model arrived at a decision point or wake up call at some point on their journeys. The point varied for each one. For some it entailed literally leaving the parental home and setting up house and career for the first time, or going to school, or taking an extended wander. For others, the tension of living an inauthentic life became too great to bear. Others received wake up calls ranging from the death of family members to the loss of a special ecological resource. Others reached a crossroads in their vocation. All, however, responded to the critical moment deliberately, consciously, and through a posture and practice of discernment. They did not retreat to the familiar, but instead crossed a threshold toward intentional and deeper ecological enlightenment and sustainable action. They crossed over; so many others, even if subjected to similar life circumstances, as Sister Gail Worcelo reminded us in her Chapter 4 profile, turn back.

The lives of the role models leading up to their critical moments seem to have prepared them for a “moment of readiness” (G. Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008) so they could say “yes” when they heard the call. As described in Chapter 4, many of the factors supporting these role models for their “moments of readiness” were also identified in the academic literature as important for encouraging others to turn toward earth. These Christian role models also have unique perspectives and pathways. Before reviewing those, I will briefly

outline from Chapter 4, some of the experiences these role models share with others, including:

### Experiences in Nature

- Free and safe nature exploration especially for children, although adults also may “wake up” through significant experiences in the natural world
- Participation in ecological restoration projects

### Study

- Education, especially personal study and learning (through multiple ways of knowing—head, heart, and body) natural history, ecology, earth literacy, cosmology *as well as* spirituality and religion (especially the theological underpinnings of ecological commitment)

### Learning From and Being Supported By Others

- Influential teachers, mentors, and other supportive adults
- Family and/or community tradition and influence that supports and/or models ecological enlightenment and action, spiritual-ecological practice
- Mentoring environments and supportive community; here, they both participated in and were nurtured by these communities, and/or they created and cultivated these communities for others
- Opportunities that broadened perceptions; “constructive enlarging engagement with others” (Daloz et al., 1996)

### Effectively Processing Loss

- Loss, whether personal loss (e.g., grief, illness) and/or the witnessing loss of precious landscapes and ecological resources; these experiences were used to promote deep introspection and ecological spiritual formation

### Embodying an Ethic

- Making the idea real by demonstrating intention and commitment through action such as developing a new community or organization such as an ecological learning center, volunteering for ecological restoration projects, teaching others, becoming an ecologically engaged citizen.

These kinds of experiences are vital for preparing the ground for an ecologically enlightened and sustainable way of life. However, what is central for Christian role models of

ecological enlightenment and sustainable action is coming to understand that their religious/spiritual call exists within their ecological call. The notion of “calls within calls” named by C.P. (personal communication, March 22, 2008) cannot be over emphasized.

Coming to deeper understanding about their faith, knowing at all levels (especially through the cognitive *and* relational/heart) the interconnection of their faith with their ecological call and commitment, and nurturing both with practice, is what sets these role models apart. Faith *and* practice are critical. Environmental education, time outdoors, and other means of cultivating an ecological identity were an important part of the mix; but for these Christian role models, coming into ecological enlightenment and committing to a sustainable life occurred within the context of their religious faith integrated with ecological understanding (and in some cases cosmological) and development of the interior through practice. Role models live lives of faith, guided by belief, held up by radical trust, faithful (disciplined) in their commitments and actions, and broadened in sight. Each of these expressions of faith informs and affects the role models’ ecological enlightenment and sustainability practice. Often it is the belief that leads the role models to a new way of seeing and acting in the world. Belief and vision of Jesus are central in crafting a worldview (e.g., panentheism, two-book theology—nature and the Word, Jesus as Model, Jesus as Incarnation of God, primacy of the Gospels).

Each role model’s sustainability journey was guided and supported by their faith and practice. While each expressed these in different ways, their faith perspectives provided the vision, guidebook, trail markers, maps and other navigational tools for the journey. Their various spiritual and religious practices offered discipline and fitness for the journey. Borg (2003) considered “practice” to be essential for birthing and developing the journey.

Central to the idea of *cultivating* ecological enlightenment and sustainable living is practice. Following a specific set of practices does not guarantee a turn toward earth, but it can prepare the ground for sustainability seeds to take hold. Borg (2003) summarizes this process in the context of spiritual transformation, but the same can be said for sustainability:

Being born again is the work of the Spirit. Whether it happens suddenly or gradually, we can't make it happen, either by strong desire and determination or by learning and believing the right beliefs. But we can be intentional about being born again. Though we can't make it happen, we can midwife the process. This is the purpose of spirituality: to help birth the new self and nourish the new life. Spirituality is midwifery (p. 120).

We can midwife the process. We do this through an inclusive spirituality that recognizes the integrated nature of call and

combines awareness, intention, and practice. I define it as *becoming conscious and intentional about a deepening relationship with God*. The words are very carefully chosen. *Becoming conscious of our relationship with God*: I am convinced that we are all already in relationship to God and have been from our birth. God is in relationship with us: spirituality is about becoming aware of a relationship that already exists. *Becoming intentional about our relationship with God*: spirituality is about paying attention to the relationship. . . . We do so in the ways we pay attention in a human relationship: by spending time in it, attending to it, being thoughtful about it (Borg, 2003, p. 120).

The spiritual disciplines are “a way of sowing to the Spirit” (Foster, 1998, p. 7). For Borg (2003), they are a way of cultivating “thin places” (p. 149). The practices are a way of cooperating with Grace—the path of disciplined Grace (Foster, 1998). Eco-depth psychologist Bill Plotkin (2008) stated throughout his book on *Nature and the Human Soul* that “our conscious cooperation with grace makes all the difference [and that] learning to cooperate consciously with grace—as individuals and as a species—is one of the essential elements in our current evolutionary opening” (p. 28). He provides innumerable practices and tasks to support this cooperation.

Through their commitment to authenticity, practice, discernment, and service to Spirit and nature, each role model cultivates this cooperation with Grace and recognizes the partnership element of it. Their journeys are not a passive waiting for “Other” to act, but result from the blend of intention, personal will, and Grace. Schauffler (2003) discovered that “conversion . . . cannot be choreographed. The process happens through a fortuitous mix of choice and chance, when ‘will and grace’ are joined” (p. 9).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Recognize and Develop Integrated Practices**

Simply put, in the minds, hearts, and actions of these role models, spirituality and sustainability are intertwined—sustainability practice is a spiritual commitment and spirituality/religion cannot be separated from sustainable action. This awareness and embodied knowing must be cultivated. This is what C.P. considered the cultivation of “calls within calls” (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008).

Many classic sustainability definitions, frameworks, and recommendations offered by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) and the President’s Council on Sustainable Development (1998) do not address spirituality and religion. Nor do approaches offered by most local and regional environmental programs like the Chesapeake Bay Program and Chesapeake Bay Foundation. The economic, regulatory, technological, information, policy, planning, and educational recommendations of these works and programs are crucial, but could be made even more effective by addressing the psycho-spiritual foundations of human choice. The transformational potential and ethical foundation often associated with religious/spiritual pathways offers historically untapped opportunity to supplement existing environmental outreach

strategies. The intent is not to replace existing approaches, but to supplement them by attending to new voices, venues, and practices.

### **Bridge the Schisms**

Despite over four decades of inquiry and dialogue on religion and ecology, including several important joint policy statements between science and religious leaders, there remains suspicion between the fields. I heard this in the stories of the role models and have experienced it firsthand throughout my career as an environmental professional. Some of this suspicion is warranted, but much is ill-placed and based on unfounded understanding of what the vast majority of people of faith and environmentalists are really like. Instead, the extreme positions of each group capture attention and build barriers to dialogue instead of bridges. At this critical crossroads moment, we must move beyond this impasse.

For too long environmental organizations have been saying we need to awaken people to ecological issues and appropriate action, instill a sense of wonder and connection with the natural world, and transform consciousness and behavior. Similarly, religious organizations are increasingly calling for more environmentally responsible behavior. Both entities express that they need help in acting in the areas that are not historically of their purview, yet many religious and environmental organizations stay away from each other and remain suspicious of one another. True, there are differences and some religious *and* environmental organizations are more fundamentalist in their perspectives and tend to remain insular and dichotomous in their perspectives. However, the vast majority, are increasingly approachable and open to collaboration. When Executive Director of the Sierra Club Carl Pope “confessed that [his] generation of environmentalists had sinned . . . by [walking] away from the churches, the

synagogues, the mosques, and the temples—from the very institutions to which millions of people turn when seeking to live out their deepest values (2008, p. 18)” he identified a core problem that exists to this day, but is slowly beginning to change. However, to “cultivate the [ecologically] conscious citizen” in the timely manner required to address today’s critical moment, partnerships must be significantly expanded.

Many environmental organizations remain suspicious of contributions from these realms and do not reach out. One of the limitations of the environmental movement is the distrust and blame that persists in separating many environmentalists and environmental organizations from spiritual and religious people and places (Gardner, 2002). Whether viewed as too “New Agey” and non-empirical or too fundamentalist and driven to “subdue” the earth—a lingering legacy that stems from the incomplete reading of White’s (1967) essay remains (Gardner, 2002). Many environmental programs steer clear of matters of faith and spiritual formation. In my more than twenty years of consulting myriad organizations about the watershed approach in locations all around the country (e.g., from the Chesapeake Bay to Lake Tahoe), an even longer time volunteering for environmental causes offering a range of perspectives from outdoor education to voluntary simplicity, and academically studying these issues, I have consistently noticed a schism between the kinds of needs expressed by these groups and the kinds of support sought and actions offered.

Many of the concerns expressed by some in the environmental movement have merit, especially when considering some of the negative roles certain religious people and institutions have exerted in the world, “in fostering wars, in ignoring racial and social injustice, and in promoting unequal gender relations” (Tucker and Grim, 2000, p. xx). Throughout history the words of many great spiritual texts like the Bible have been misused to promote selfish human

ends. Even today one does not have to work very hard to find countless examples of this in many venues as forces of fundamentalism co-opt the wisdom teachings to promote their unholy political agendas (Wallis, 2005).

However, just as religion has the potential to hurt, it also offers the potential to heal. Its role in shaping peoples' worldviews, providing moral authority and educating about values, transforming lives, and establishing strong social and financial networks to achieve beneficial ends is well documented (Gardner, 2002). Environmentally and religiously focused people often share mutual goals (e.g., opposition to excess consumption). To attain these goals, however, bridges must be built and strengthened. There are many opportunities for cooperative involvement (e.g., dialogue sessions, mutual learning, shared activism) that could be addressed as a separate dissertation. All of the Christian role models profiled in my dissertation have made the connection between religion, spirituality, and environment and many actively work with environmental organizations and could name contacts there. It was telling to me, however, that in my initial research inquiry among over 20 environmental colleagues asking for Christian/spiritual role models of ecological enlightenment and sustainable action, practically no one could make the connection.

### **Recommendations Specific to Religious Institutions**

All of the role models are deeply faithful and spiritual people, yet few found that the existing religious institutions, the church, sparked and/or supported their process of becoming ecologically enlightened and committed to sustainability. Their faith and their practices did, but rarely was the *institutional* church mentioned as a factor. This is a lost opportunity. Religious institutions should model the kinds of behavior they recommend in the emerging letters and other

documents calling for stepped up environmental responsibility. They should seek strategic partnerships to help them align their words and works. This is beginning to happen, but, to use a common metaphor, it is presently a trickle and it must become a flood. This is the appeal preeminent biologist E.O. Wilson (2006) made to a fictitious Baptist preacher at the outset of his book, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth*.

Several of the role models spoke about how a healthy religion was productive of a healthy spirituality that would point toward the earth and ecological responsibility. They quickly added, however, that many religious institutions are falling short of that important role. Religious institutions should return to their roots, to their function of binding together that which is torn apart, and to work toward healing and transformation. This is the business of religion (Johnson, 1993). In a book aptly called, *One River, Many Wells*, theologian Matthew Fox describes the potential and challenge of religion and spirituality (Fox, 2000):

One thing that can make human existence meaningful and give us the courage and creativity to navigate our ways is healthy spirituality. When religion is true to itself and is itself healthy, it is about spirituality, for spirituality is meant to be the core of religion. But religion, like everything else that humans touch, can become distorted and misused. It can develop its own institutional ego, even while preaching to individuals about the need to humble their personal egos. . . . In times like ours, when the planet is reeling from abuse and misuse at the hands of humans... it ought to prove especially beneficial to look to spirituality to help us find our way back (and forward!) to what it means to be human. . . . It is clear that once we return to the depth or core of religion we find much more than dogmas, concepts, institutions, commands. We find a striving for experience of the Divine, however, that can be spoken of, we find both form and formlessness, male and female, experience and practice. We also find that in their core and depth we do not encounter many different religions so much as one experience that is expressed variously and with great diversity and color flowing in the name of different traditions and cultures (pp. 2-3).

By partnering with environmental organizations, religious institutions can support the cultivation of ecological enlightenment through effective ecological spiritual formation programs. Ecological spiritual formation recognizes the integrated nature of spirituality, religion,

and sustainability and broadens traditional formation by incorporating wilderness and nature-based approaches; encouraging transformational formation (such as wilderness based rites of passage); integrating with ecological identity work such as nature observation, natural history exploration, education on activism and becoming an ecological citizen; and offering earth literacy and other programs that educate about the theological underpinnings of environmental responsibility and sustainability. Ecological spiritual formation also supports the personal inner healing and restoration work that is needed to support sustainable outer actions and wholeness. A vital part of this is eco-spiritual discernment.

Religious scholar Mary Evelyn Tucker challenged religious institutions with a question: “[W]ill they [religions] emerge from their concerns with dogmas and policy regarding their own survival to see that the survival of myriad modes of life on Earth is also at stake?” (2003, pp. 8-9). The answer is simple; they must.

Religions are going through their own transformational journey. The wake up call came, in part, from Lynn White’s (1967) critical essay. The journey for many years was in the wilderness of theology and policy—academics and others were mining their traditions and seeking treasures of wisdom to guide them forward. More recently, religions are beginning to return with gifts, and action oriented organizations like Interfaith Power and Light and the Evangelical Environmental Network are beginning to make a difference. The next step is to augment outward action through deliberate ecological spiritual formation. Tucker (2003) wrote:

This emerging field of religion and ecology, then, looks both inward and outward. It looks inward to the resources of the traditions, historically and at present, that foster mutually beneficial human-Earth relations. At the same time it looks outward toward dialogue with those in other disciplines such as science, economics, and policy, knowing that lasting cultural changes will depend on such key intersections (p. 32).

Religions can help shape a “globally comprehensive environmental ethics” that can help mediate friction between economic development and environmental protection interests. Most of the world’s religions share “common concern” for:

- Reverence for the earth
- Respect for other species
- Responsibility to the welfare of future generations
- Restraint in the consumption of resources
- Redistribution of goods and services more equitably (Tucker, 2003, p. 35).

Perhaps more importantly, religions offer potential transformational communities.

### **Recommendations Specific to the Environmental Community**

Many of the role models heard the call through an environmental studies/sustainability course, program, or experience such as college and graduate school courses, Genesis Farm/Earth Literacy programs, voluntary simplicity study circles, and/or stream restoration projects. Furthermore, many were influenced by mentors. Yet, these opportunities are limited. There is a greening of the seminaries program that should be expanded and must include vital environmental education curricula. More importantly, environmental organizations must partner with religious and spiritual institutions that are pursuing environmental responsibility to provide vital educational resources and opportunities to participate in restoration projects. Environmental organizations, *if* they walk their talk (and they should), could provide excellent mentoring support. Integrated mentoring communities of transformational sustainability could be developed through partnerships between religious, spiritual, and environmental organizations and people. A key aspect of working with people and places of faith is language and relevance—environmental

organizations cannot go in with an air of “let us tell you what to do.” It is necessary to use appropriate language and link ecological responsibility with faith—establish the concept of calls within calls (ecological calls with spiritual/religious calls).

Additionally, within the academy there is opportunity for greater collaboration between environmental studies and religious education and spiritual formation programs. Several of my research participants were opened to the concept of sustainability through environmental education opportunities, but it took deeper spiritual experiences and support to assist them in crossing the threshold to a new way of life. C.P. eloquently summarized the schism between academic fields:

The divine was not mentioned when I was studying the science of environment in college and earth was not mentioned later when I was studying theology. So, I had a deep love for both—theology and environmental studies—but they didn’t seem to be informing each other (C.P., personal communication, March 22, 2008).

C.P., like others, lived with the discomfort of this schism until his journey brought alignment of head, heart, and body—only then were words matched with outer actions on a sustained basis. It was the development of calls within calls that formed these role models of ecological enlightenment and sustainable action.

All three of my academic degrees are in the environmental field (Undergrad concentration and Ph.D. in Environmental Studies, M.A. in Geography) and none of the departments consistently collaborated with religion, psychology, or other spiritually focused and/or human transformation fields. While this is clearly an unscientific survey of the broader academy, and a few institutions are crossing boundaries, they are the exception rather than the rule. To be serious about “cultivating the [ecologically] enlightened citizen,” environmental

institutions, from the academy to the federal government, must develop effective partnerships with colleagues in the religion, spiritual transformation, and human development fields.

### **Collaborate and Cultivate “Ideasheds”**

Fred Tutman, Patuxent River Keeper, shared an idea that stuck with me and points to the potential transformational power of cooperating environmental and religious organizations—working together they can cultivate effective “ideasheds.” Using the watershed analogy, Fred suggested that many of the barriers to sustainability exist from the lack of infrastructure (such as policy, legal, technological, educational, and financial resources) to support it. He cited a personal example where he and a partner desired to produce organic goat cheese in Maryland, but were prohibited by law. When I visited some of the role models in their home places, I immediately noticed the lack of opportunities for sustainable choices like organic, local food.

All of the role models identified ways they were stymied or slowed down in their commitment to sustainability by the lack of local support and choices. Churches offer excellent social networking opportunities and environmental/sustainability organizations have the knowledge. Together, these entities could develop more robust ideasheds in underserved areas. Some of the role models are beginning to do this by offering “Creation Care Groups” or developing CSAs to serve areas bereft of local foods.

This collaboration could extend beyond education, however, as the combined forces of religious and environmental people and institutions could co-create and advocate for effective changes in economic, policy, regulatory, and political realms.

## NEXT STEPS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are many pathways to explore to further this research, yet as I deepen in my own discernment about how to support the Great Work (Berry, 1999), I am drawn to applied research yielding on-the-ground results. This section will identify several action research opportunities (Greenwood and Levin, 1998) and conclude with some of my personal next steps.

### **Explore Multi-religious Perspectives and Deepen Current Research**

My grounded theory study of ten Christian role models identified clear themes, many of which were affirmed through parallel findings and theoretical explorations in the academic literature. However, to provide relevance to a broader audience, particularly within the environmental community, it is vital to expand this exploration to a multi-religious perspective, as well as to more secular role models. I would like to expand my research to Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist role models (and a non-religious control group) to identify the unique, but more importantly *shared*, perspectives and pathways leading to ecological enlightenment and sustainable action. In addition, I feel there is a need to further explore mainline Protestant perspectives.

The excellent case study and historical work of Carroll (2004) and Taylor (2007), respectively, focuses on ecologically oriented Catholics. This level of depth about on-the-ground practices, coupled with my research on the *process of becoming sustainable*, should be applied to a broader religious spectrum. The results would provide valuable information to environmental and religious organizations on how to support the cultivation of ecologically enlightened citizens.

The open-ended prompt that guided my research, “Please tell me about your journey towards and commitment to an ecologically enlightened and sustainable way of life,” yielded a wealth of information; each discovered theme could be explored in greater detail. In future research, I would especially like to deepen my inquiry in the following areas:

- The role of faith (using Borg’s, 2003, framework), especially factors that transformed faith as *visio*, or way of seeing.
- Greater detail about the threshold journey, especially how the role models navigated the “road of trials” (Campbell, 1973) and overcame struggles that are inherent in a turn away from the dominant paradigm.
- More information about the specific types and qualities of the spiritual/religious practices that support the turn.
- The potential for developmental tasks to foster ecological enlightenment and sustainability: Two works on human development (Fowler, 1995 and Plotkin, 2008) greatly helped me understand the role models’ journeys. Both works address specific developmental tasks that support psycho-spiritual maturation and Plotkin (2008) specifically examines the relationship between human psycho-spiritual maturation and development of eco-centric perspectives and actions.

### **Conduct Action Research Project(s) to Implement and Test Recommendations**

A key aspect of cultivating the ecologically enlightened citizen is recognizing and nurturing the development of “calls within calls” (i.e., understanding that for some, an ecological call is inseparable from a spiritual/religious call). Environmental organizations should broaden their approaches to address psycho-spiritual dimensions of the environmental crisis and/or partner with organizations that can support this kind of outreach. Religious institutions must integrate environmental appreciation, experience, and education (e.g., new cosmology, place-based studies, natural history and ecology, environmental studies, and creation care) to develop

*ecological spiritual formation*. For both entities the intent is not to replace existing approaches, but to supplement them by attending to new voices, venues, and practices.

Central to doing this is building bridges and creating partnerships. It is not reasonable to expect that environmental organizations, for example, will suddenly begin offering spiritual formation programs; that is not their historic purview. Nor will religious institutions suddenly become experts at ecology and sustainability. However, both entities must address the growing mandate of ecological responsibility and will have greater success working together than apart.

A valuable next step of this research project would be to develop an action research project where the findings and recommendations are tested on the ground in a collaborative fashion with others. I hope to pursue a pilot study with an environmental organization (or organizations), like the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and/or Chesapeake Bay Program, willing to partner with a network of religious institutions and communities to:

- Develop and test the efficacy of environmental education and ecological spiritual formation programs
- Cultivate ideasheds that evaluate existing program resources, identify gaps, and implement innovative collaborative solutions.

### **Personal Next Steps**

A testimony to the power of these role models' examples is how their stories transform others. Several reviewers of my dissertation commented on how they were changed by reading about the journeys and tangible actions of the role models. Certainly that was my experience in conducting this research and I have gained personal strength through their examples to ever deepen my commitment to a sustainable way of life. My commitment to spiritual practice and ecological living have dramatically deepened over the course of my research and my priority

“next steps” are to continue that journey, specifically by entering a period of discernment guided by the following questions:

- How can I best serve the Great Work at this time with my unique gifts, passions, and skills?
- What is the best place, community, and platform for me to do this work?
- How can I remain personally sustainable and fully thriving in the process – fully alive, joyous, healthy, happy, and at peace?

## FINAL WORDS

I started my dissertation with the words of the international *Earth Charter*, “We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future” (Earth Charter Commission, 2000). This critical moment is one where we are poised as a society and as individuals, at a crossroads presenting alternate views of how to move forward or stay the course. Some options lead us toward a more life-sustaining future and others hold on to an ecologically destructive past. Examples of the tension between each way abound at the crossroads; we see them globally, nationally, and in our local communities. The choice is not so clear cut, however, and even steps in a new direction will drawn from and integrate traces from the former path.

It feels appropriate that I complete my dissertation in Spring, the seasonal time when Earth, in all its abundance, is emerging. The vernal pools are teeming with new life; the bulbs from last fall’s plantings are beginning to show their glory; the song of birds and frogs fills the air; and hope in it many guises unfolds as the days grow longer. The reminder of new beginnings is fresh.

The crossroads alluded to in the *Earth Charter* and described throughout my dissertation is a perilous time but also is a time of great opportunity. Swimme and Berry (1994) remind us that the creation of the universe was marked by times of great turbulence, of seeming catastrophe, that birthed periods of astounding creativity—moments of cosmological, historical, and religious grace. We are at one of these moments. In the words of *Chesapeake Futures*, “The kind of Bay our children inherit will depend on the choices we make at the dawn of this new century. Already the projections are sobering” (Boesch and Greer, 2003, p. 7). This kind of moment is occurring not just in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, but around the world.

The turn toward a more ecologically enlightened and sustainable way is happening and must happen at all levels, but fundamentally it involves a shift in consciousness, a shift in worldview – a shift to a new story and a new way of being in the world. And this, among so many other reasons, is why traditions of faith have a vital role—if not THE vital role—in this Great Work of our day. Addressing issues of environmental action is so much more than just a scientific, economic or political question. Increasingly, many consider it foremost a religious question.

Simply put, we have to change the way we live. Yes, we must continue the array of current environmental programs and approaches, but we must dig deeper toward the root causes of unsustainable behavior. Values and practices from all the faith traditions can show us the way forward. These shared values—love, wonder, connection, trust, simplicity, reconciliation, and service—will support the movement toward “mutually enhancing human-earth relations” (Berry, 2006) that must mark this new ecologically oriented era. It is our emerging calling. McFague (1992) reminds us that “the planetary agenda cannot be an

avocation, something one does in addition to one's everyday work—a pastime or hobby, as it were—but needs to be one's VOCATION, one's central CALLING” (p. 47).

People and communities of faith can and must support this great transformation because they are vital in shaping worldviews and ethical frameworks, offering spiritual formation, influencing behavior and policies, and connecting to and fostering community. The role models profiled in my dissertation demonstrate a posture of alignment where the passion of the heart and the knowledge of the head are “concretized in the flesh” (Worcelo, personal communication, March 5, 2008) in their daily lives and works. Religions, in their authentic expression, foster wonder and passion for Mystery. At their root, *religare*, they bind together that which is torn apart and offer the opportunity for healing. The role models understand the integrated nature of their religious and ecological calls and have bound them together in their lives. These role models are unique; many people and communities of faith have desire to become more environmentally responsible, yet they are not experts in environmental studies, ecological identity development, natural history, or sustainability. Partnerships must be forged with the environmental community.

At this time in the early twenty-first century, we stand at the place where two roads diverge, and may we, with the poetic sensibility of Robert Frost, “take the least traveled” way for it will “make all the difference.” I conclude my dissertation with words from the *Earth Charter* because (1) it represents an international, multi-faith, and multi-disciplinary collaboration between religious, science, environmental, and governmental organizations, and (2) it frames my intention:

We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and great promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst

of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace. Towards this end, it is imperative that we, the peoples of Earth, declare our responsibility to one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations. . . . As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning. . . . This requires a change of mind and heart. . . . Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life (Earth Charter Commission, 2000).

My last word comes as hope and prayer. I conclude this chapter by returning to West Virginia and the broader Appalachian Highlands. During the course of the five months writing this dissertation, immense change has occurred at the crossroads. As mentioned in Chapter 2, after the populace acted collectively, the state slogan and welcome sign returned: “Wild and Wonderful West Virginia.” Today the area has an even greater opportunity to remain wild and wonderful. On March 24, 2009, the national Environmental Protection Agency put on hold “hundreds of mountaintop coal-mining permits until it can evaluate the projects’ impacts on streams and wetlands” (Associated Press, 2009). The many voices calling for this action, including the Council of Churches, were finally heard. May it be so.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> These headlines are indicative of the myriad headlines addressing the historic ice storm and economic crisis of 2009. These were obtained from a quick Internet search (Boston Globe, FoxBusiness.com, New York Times.com, and Finding Dulcinea).

<sup>ii</sup> This references the 2007 national “Step It Up” campaign for global climate change action that was embraced by many religious institutions and people as well as the plethora of religious-based letters for environmental action such as the National Council of Church’s call for environmental responsibility. Also see Wallis, 2008 and Nhat Hahn and Weisman, 2008.

<sup>iii</sup> In an extensive consulting project for EPA’s Chesapeake Bay Program, a colleague and I interviewed over twenty program managers, planners, local government and nonprofit leaders and long-term Bay restoration professionals. The Assistant Director of the Bay Program provided a summary note that exemplified the sentiments of many informants, and echoes conditions with environmental programs around the country: “much effort is presently expended on increasing peoples’ awareness, which is good, but expanded efforts must move from awareness to action (Escher, D., personal communication, 2005). Many Chesapeake Bay Program practitioners and other environmental professionals and activists declare that a new ethic is required, one that addresses unsustainable human behavior such as the way we live on and use the land and its resources (Boesch and Greer, 2003; SAIC, 2004). The *Chesapeake Futures* report, in particular, calls for the cultivation of “the enlightened citizen.” Summarizing the need for a new ethic, *Chesapeake Futures* concludes with questions (Boesch and Greer, 2003):

Key laws, such as the Critical Area Act or the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act, have helped control destructive development practices at the water’s edge. But legislation cannot and should not guide all our behaviors and decisions. How can we instill a new ethic, so that the future Chesapeake retains the beauty and productivity that have made it famous? How can we teach our children to treasure the landscape, that their behavior ultimately determines the health of the Bay (p. 10)?

<sup>iv</sup> Here I am referencing the Earth Charter (Earth Charter Commission, 2000, Macy and Brown, 1998, Korten, 2006, and Obama, 2009, respectively).

<sup>v</sup> References that discuss this disconnect between theory and praxis include, but certainly are not limited to, Carroll, 2004; Cobb, 2000; McFague, 2000 and 2008; and Tucker, 2002 and 2003. In addition, psycho-spiritual writers and teachers for millennia have been reflecting upon the human condition that causes most people to struggle mightily with the disconnection between their inner desires and their abilities to manifest them as outward action (Keating, 1996, p. 10). This dilemma is captured in the Bible as the Apostle Paul’s lament, when he declares, “I don’t understand myself at all. I really want to do what is right, but I can’t. I do what I don’t want to do—what I hate” (quoted in Keating, 1996, p. 10 from Romans 7:15-24 of *The Living Gospel*).

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<sup>vi</sup> Referencing a September 11, 2007 Statement on Mountain Top Removal from the West Virginia Council of Churches.

<sup>vii</sup> We are likely on the verge of, or in the midst of, a sixth mega-extinction. Consider these words from preeminent biologist E.O. Wilson: “Scientists estimate that if habitat conversion and other destructive human activities continue at their present rates, half the species of plants and animals on Earth could be either gone or at least fated for early extinction by the end of the century. A full quarter will drop to this level during the next half century as a result of climate change alone. The ongoing extinction rate is calculated in the most conservative estimates to be about a hundred times above that prevailing before humans appeared on Earth, and it is expected to rise to at least a thousand times greater or more in the next few decades. If this rise continues unabated, the cost to humanity, in wealth, environmental security, and quality of life will be catastrophic” (4-5).

<sup>viii</sup> Example references include Berry, 1991 and 1999; Berry and Swimme, 1992; Korten, 2006; McFague, 2008; McKibben, 2007; and Speth, 2008).

<sup>ix</sup> See their web site for more information:  
(<http://www.cornwallalliance.org/press/read/evangelical-environmental-group-applauds-national-association-of-evangelicals/>) and also (<http://www.we-get-it.org/declaration/>)

<sup>x</sup> McKibben (2007) comments that current concepts of economic growth were initiated in the eighteenth century, accelerated dramatically after World War II and later again during the Reagan revolution (“out with limits, in with Trump”), and more recently with expanded globalization of the 1990s (pp. 6, 9).

<sup>xi</sup> This percentage represents the approximate mid-range of values (63% to 81%) from various surveys compiled at [www.religioustolerance.org](http://www.religioustolerance.org).

<sup>xii</sup> Agriculture is a vibrant part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed’s history and culture and agriculture also is a significant source of pollution to the Bay. At 285 acres, the active and working Clagett Farm serves an important function to (1) preserve farmland amidst encroaching sprawl and (2) model environmentally sustainable farming. In addition, Clagett Farm provides vital environmental education opportunities and an important eco-justice outreach through its Community Supported Agriculture program. In addition, the farm raises grass fed cattle and has a native tree nursery. More information can be found at [http://www.cbf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about\\_epr\\_clagett](http://www.cbf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_epr_clagett).

<sup>xiii</sup> Jenn was raised in the south, South Carolina, where social pressure to conform to certain roles often is present.

<sup>xiv</sup> The cosmic walk is a ritual designed to celebrate the 13.7 billion years of universe unfolding. Originally designed by Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis of Genesis Farm, many have modified it

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over the years. In its original form, the ritual entails walking a spiral path that contains markers for each historically important event of the Universe Story, from its origins to the present moment.

<sup>xv</sup> <sup>22</sup>By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. <sup>24</sup>And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup>If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. <sup>26</sup>Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another (Gallatians 22-26).

<sup>xvi</sup> “Religion is the passion, or the desire, both to live right—not just to live but to live right—and to spread right living, both desires conceived as responses to some sort of cosmic demand—that is, to a demand made to us by the way things are, by the way the world is, by the nature of Nature (as some would say) or by God himself (as explicitly religious people put it). (Booth as cited in DeWitt, 2007, p. 125).

<sup>xvii</sup> Cal considers the “con-servancy” principle as one where “We should return the service of creation to us with service of our own.” See [www.aeseonline.org/Cal](http://www.aeseonline.org/Cal) DeWitt.

<sup>xviii</sup> Here, Margaret is referencing the Christian Christmas message that “*it is in the flesh that we learn who God is*” (Galiardi, 2004, p. 17).

<sup>xix</sup> See the Chesapeake Bay Foundation web site for more information, including a fact sheet that can be retrieved from (<http://www.p2pays.org/ref/22/21300/PDFs/31972pd.pdf>).

<sup>xx</sup> <sup>18</sup>As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup>And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” <sup>20</sup>Immediately they left their nets and followed him. <sup>21</sup>As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. <sup>22</sup>Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. (Matthew 4)

<sup>xxi</sup> Matthew Sleeth documented his journey in a book, *Serve God, Save the Planet* (2006). Nancy recently published her own book, *Go Green, \$ave Green: A Simple Guide to Saving Time, Money, and GOD’S Green Earth* (2009). Both supported development of Harper’s new *Green Bible* (2008). Even their daughter wrote about the family journey from her perspective, *It’s Easy Being Green* (Sleeth, 2008).

<sup>xxii</sup> Nancy shared in our interview that “He was caught in the undertow and when I did this research, I found that in the Atlantic these undertows are getting worse and worse. I mean, we don’t harp on climate change, that is not our focus, but it is clear that the temperature of the water has changed and it is resulting in more severe weather, although scientists, or most scientists, will not say that any one weather event is caused by climate change, but that the

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increase in severity is linked to it. And again, that gets back to real people die. Matthew tells the story in the book of the little girl who dies from an asthma attack... and those are real people.”

<sup>xxiii</sup> The value components of self-transcendence include unity with nature, protecting the environment, preventing pollution, respecting the earth, a world at peace, equality, social justice, being helpful, and a world of beauty.

<sup>xxiv</sup> Plotkin (2008) calls this leaving the “adolescent ‘home’ of your first personality” (p. 233) but also cites Jungian analyst James Hollis who considers the transition one from the “first adulthood” to the “second adulthood” (Hollis as cited in Plotkin, 2008, p. 233).

<sup>xxv</sup> The four dimensions of the self represent the archetypal energies of the four cardinal directions, or the four seasons of the self. These include the “nurturing parent” in the north, the “sage” in the east, the “wild child” in the south,” and the “guide to soul” in the west. This concept is illuminated in greater detail in Plotkin, 2008.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Plotkin (2008) suggested that many, if not most, environmentalists reflect this more “black and white” stage of non-critical reflection characteristic of Stage 3 (Plotkin, 2008 and Fowler, 1995 both use the notion of Stage 3 development).

<sup>xxvii</sup> As part of my research I attended a Holy Week retreat in 2007 led by two of my research participants. The retreat was entitled, “Celebrating Easter with Earth” and held at the Spring Bank Earth Literacy Center.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Regarding faith and works, from James 2: <sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup>So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

<sup>xxix</sup> (21) “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. (22) On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?’ (23) Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; go away from me, you evil doers.’” (Matthew 7: 21-23, NRSV).

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## APPENDIX A.

### INFORMAL CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CALLS: LANGUAGE AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

(Note: The following summaries are compiled directly from the sourced documents. Language is either paraphrased or directly quoted. Sources are mentioned with each.)

#### CHURCH DECLARATIONS

##### **The National Council of Churches** (> 44 million)

This group represents the majority of mainstream Protestant churches in the United States

##### **Language:**

Ecologically sustainable/sustainability, “serve and preserve” the Garden (Genesis 2:15), restoration, social and environmental responsibility, eco-justice, stewardship

##### **Recommended Actions:**

- Repent of our sins—“This repentance of our social and ecological sins will acknowledge the special responsibility that falls to those of us who are citizens of the United States. Though only five percent of the planet’s human population, we produce one-quarter of the world’s carbon emissions, consume a quarter of its natural resources, and perpetuate scandalous inequities at home and abroad.”
- “Pursue a new journey together”
  - Guiding Norms
    - Justice: seek eco-justice (the integration of social justice and ecological integrity); develop a set of human environmental rights
    - Sustainability
    - Bioresponsibility: “extending the covenant of justice to include all other life forms as beloved creatures of God and expressions of God...”
    - Humility: recognizing the “limits of human knowledge, technological ingenuity, and moral character. We are not the masters of creation... humility keeps our own species in check.”
    - Generosity: recognizing that humans are “communities of socially and ecologically interdependent beings”... and a “measure of good society is not whether it privileges those who already have much, but rather it privileges the most vulnerable members of creation.” This calls for “good government at all levels, from local to regional to national to international.”
    - Frugality: Simplicity. “It demands the careful conservation of Earth’s riches, comprehensive recycling, minimal harm to other species, material efficiency and the elimination of waste, and product durability.”
    - Solidarity: “a commitment to the global common good through international cooperation.”
    - Compassion
  - Actions
    - “We are called to worship God with all our being and actions, and to treat creation as sacred.”

- “We must engage our political leaders in supporting the very future of this planet.”
- Understanding by listening to the most vulnerable: “awaken the ‘ears of our souls’
- “Integrating this understanding into our core beliefs and practices” (e.g., mission statements, ministries, financial stewardship, etc.)
- “Advocating boldly with all our leaders on behalf of creation’s most vulnerable members”
- “Restoring God’s Earth”
- Climate-specific actions from (NCC Faith Principles on Global Warming)
  - Mitigate global warming for all, particularly vulnerable populations
  - Use clean and renewable energy
  - Focus on fair and equitable distribution of benefits and costs
  - Take action now
  - Pursue legislation having comprehensive, mandatory, aggressive reduction emissions
  - Call on emitters to take responsibility and work to reduce their carbon emissions
  - Energy conservation: we must make “changes in our lifestyles and particularly in our energy conservation”

**Sources:**

- National Council of Churches Open Letter on Environmental Responsibility, “God’s Earth is Sacred: An Open Letter to Church and Society in the United States” (February 14, 2005)
- National Council of Churches: Faith Principles on Global Warming

**The Roman Catholic Church** (>67 million)

The largest single denomination with over 65 million members in the U.S. alone.

**Language:**

Stewardship, ecologic conversion, eco-justice, lifestyle choices, ecological sustainability, ecological awareness, simplicity, ecological responsibility, stewardship, future generations, respecting life, equity, caring for the poor, care for creation

**Recommended Actions:**

- Encourage and support ecological conversion (Pope John Paul II, 2001)
- Embrace various forms of eco-justice (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2003):
  - Contemplative response (“deepen our capacity to appreciate the wonders of nature as an act of faith and love”);
  - Ascetic response
    - “Adjust our lifestyle choices and daily actions to respect ecological limits, attune us to solidarity with vulnerable peoples”
    - “‘Fast’ from actions that pollute
    - Run a greener household and decrease use of fossil fuels
    - Tithe time, treasure, and talent to environmental causes
    - Buy locally produced goods, organic food, fairly traded merchandise

- Challenge the hold of the marketplace over our lives by conscious efforts to avoid over-consumption and by using our purchasing power to promote earth-friendly enterprises”
  - Prophetic response (“Make the link between social and ecological justice more evident in our preaching and community action.”)
- Respond to global climate change (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001):
  - Support Kyoto and similar deliberations
  - Pursue energy conservation and the development of alternate renewable and clean-energy resources.
  - Be guided by fundamental moral values: the universal common good, respect for God's creation, an option for the poor, and a sense of intergenerational obligation.
  - “Public policy should assist industrial sectors and workers especially impacted by climate change policies, and it should offer incentives to corporations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and assistance to workers affected by these policies.”
  - Personal conversion and responsibility: we need to ask about ways we can conserve energy, prevent pollution, and live more simply.

#### **Sources:**

- “God made man the steward of creation,” Pope John Paul II, General Audience, January 17, 2001
- Christian Ecological Imperative: Educate yourself—then act. A Pastoral Letter from the Social Affairs Commission, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, October 4, 2003
- John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1990), no. 6.
- Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good: *A Statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Issued by NCCB/USCC, June 15, 2001. Copyright © 2001, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Inc. All rights reserved.*
- *Renewing the Earth*, a statement by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops delivered on November 14, 1991

#### **Common Declaration by Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I (2002)**

#### **Language:**

Care of creation, stewardship, environmentally ethical behavior, social justice and responsibility

#### **Recommended Actions:**

- Encourage growth of and educate people in ecological awareness
- Repentance and Conversion: We need an act of repentance... “A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an inner change of heart, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act.”
- “Regain humility and recognize the limits of our powers... and the limits of our knowledge and judgment... [we need] a new approach and a new culture... inspired by environmentally ethical behavior stemming from our triple relationship to God, to self and to creation. Such an ethic fosters interdependence and stresses the principles of universal solidarity, social justice and responsibility, in order to promote a true culture of life.”

- Consider future generations and the world's children "when we reflect on and evaluate our options for action."
- Study the "true values based on the natural law that sustain every human culture"
- "To use science and technology in a full and constructive way."
- "To be humble regarding the idea of ownership and to be open to the demands of solidarity... We have not been entrusted with unlimited power over creation, we are only stewards of the common heritage."
- To promote a peaceful approach to this dialogue.

### **Evangelical Environmental Network**

#### **Language:**

Stewardship of creation, restoration, wholeness, transcendent and immanent God, creation care and renewal, environmental protection and stewardship; lifestyle change to reflect creation care; simplify

#### **Recommended Actions:**

- First, confess and repent
- Second, "our actions and attitudes toward the earth need to proceed from the center of our faith, and be rooted in the fullness of God's revelation in Christ and the Scriptures."
- Learn from the Bible about "Creator, creation, and the human task."
- "Reaffirm that all creation is God's; that God created it good; and that God is renewing it in Christ"
- "Deeper reflection on the wonders of God's creation and the principles by which creation works," as well as "the substantial biblical and theological teaching..."
- Carefully consider the implications of corporate and individual actions
  - Become a center of "creation care and renewal"
  - "Resist the allure of wastefulness and overconsumption by making personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self restraint and frugality"
- Work for "godly, just, and sustainable economies"
- Work for "responsible public policies which embody the principles of biblical stewardship of creation"
- "Listen to and work with all those who are concerned about the healing of creation"

#### **Sources:**

- Evangelical Environmental Network, "On the Care of Creation: An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" (multiple signatories; over 500 evangelical leaders), 1994
- "Why Creation Care? Answers to Common Questions" from Re:Vision—Broadening Perspectives, Inspiring Action, from [www.revision.org](http://www.revision.org) which is copyrighted by National Association of Evangelicals, 2006
- Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action,"

## **MULTIRELIGIOUS, SCIENCE, AND COLLABORATIVE DECLARATIONS**

More detailed information about these historic collaborative documents is provided in *Worldly Wonder* (Tucker, 2003).

## **U.N. World Charter for Nature, 1982**

(The document that influenced Thomas Berry.)

### **Language:**

“[R]ecognize the urgency of maintaining the stability and quality of nature and conserving natural resources,” justice and peace, “use natural resources in a manner which ensures the preservation of the species and ecosystems for the benefit of present and future generations,” re. ecosystems, organisms, land, marine and atmospheric resources—“shall be managed to achieve and maintain optimum sustainable productivity, but not in such a way as to endanger the integrity of those other ecosystems or species with which they coexist”

### **Recommended Actions:**

- General Principles
  - Habitats shall be safeguarded
  - Natural resources shall not be wasted
  - Activities which might have an impact on nature shall be controlled, and the best available technologies that minimize significant risks to nature or other adverse effects shall be used
  - Discharge of pollutants into natural systems shall be avoided
  - Measures intended to prevent, control or limit natural disasters, infestations and diseases shall be specifically directed to the causes of these scourges and shall avoid adverse side-effects on nature.
- Implementation
  - Call for laws to support the principles
  - Call for ecological education
  - Planning should include “the formulation of strategies for the conservation of nature, the establishment of inventories of ecosystems and assessments of the effects on nature of proposed policies and activities;” and associated call for public disclosure
  - Call for appropriate supporting funds, programs, and administrative structures
  - Call for science research and its dissemination
  - Call for monitoring
  - Call to avoid military activities damaging to nature
  - Various calls to co-operate and exchange information; establish standards and methods for assessing; implement relevant laws; avoid harm to natural systems “located within other States or in the areas beyond the limits of national jurisdiction” and related, “safeguard and conserve nature in areas beyond national jurisdiction”
  - Call for public participation
  - And one call that alludes to personal responsibility: “Each person has duty to act in accordance with the provisions of the present charter; acting individually, in association with others or through participation in the political process, each person shall strive to ensure that the objectives and requirements of the present Charter are met.”

**Source:** World Charter for Nature, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 37/7, or 28 October 1982

## **Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion, 1990**

### **Language:**

Crimes against Creation; “Problems of such magnitude, and solutions demanding so broad a perspective must be recognized from the outset as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension.”

### **Recommended Actions:**

- “Mindful of our common responsibility, we scientists—many of us long engaged in combating the environmental crisis—urgently appeal to the world religious community to commit, in word and deed, and as boldly as is required, to preserve the environment of the Earth.”
- Greater energy efficiency
- Rapid banning of chlorofluorocarbons
- Continuing swift reversal of the nuclear arms race
- Conversion from fossil fuels to a nonpolluting energy economy
- Voluntary halt to world population growth
- [Support and promote] issues of peace, human rights, and social justice
- “The environmental crisis requires radical changes not only in public policy, but in individual behavior. The historical record makes clear that religious teaching, example, and leadership are powerfully able to influence personal conduct and commitment.”
- [Regard] [o]ur planetary home ... as sacred.

**Source:** Preserving and Cherishing the Earth: An Appeal for Joint Commitment in Science and Religion, National Religious Partnership for the Environment, Global Forum, Moscow, January 1990

## **1991 The Joint Appeal In Religion and Science**

### **Language:**

Reduce consumption by affluent societies, environmental integrity and justice, call for moral transformation, indivisibility of social justice and ecological integrity, “Economic equity, racial justice, gender equality, and environmental well-being are interconnected and all are essential to peace,” sustainable householding

### **Recommended Actions:**

- “We religious leaders accept a prophetic responsibility to make known the full dimensions of this challenge, and what is required to address it, to the many millions we reach, teach, and counsel.”
- Accelerated phaseout of ozone depleting chemicals
- Much more efficient use of fossil fuels and the development of a non-fossil fuel economy
- Preservation of tropical forests and other measures to protect continued biological diversity
- Concerted efforts to slow the dramatic and dangerous growth in world population through empowering both women and men, encouraging economic self-sufficiency, and making family planning services available to all who may consider them on a strictly voluntary basis.
- [Prioritize] the cause of environmental integrity and justice
- We pledge to take the initiative in interpreting and communicating theological foundations for the stewardship of Creation

- “[T]here is a call for moral transformation, as we recognize that the roots of environmental destruction lie in human pride, greed, and selfishness, as well as the appeal of the short-term over the long-term.”
- [W]e will encourage and seek to exemplify habits of sound and sustainable householding—in land use, investment decisions, energy conservation, purchasing of products, and waste disposal.
- Specific actions include:
  - Various networking and outreach initiatives
  - Urge compliance with the Valdez Principles and preach and promote corporate responsibility
  - Encourage establishment of one model environmentally sound and sustainable facility within each faith group and denomination.
  - Provide materials for environmental audits and facilitate bulk purchasing of environmentally sound products.

**Source:** 1991 The Joint Appeal In Religion and Science: Statement by Religious Leaders at the Summit on Environment, National Religious Partnership for the Environment

### **1992 World Scientist’s Warning to Humanity**

#### **Language:**

Stewardship, reduce overconsumption, developed nations to support developing nations—“we have but one lifeboat”

#### **Recommended Actions:**

- We must bring environmentally damaging activities under control to restore and protect the integrity of the earth’s systems we depend on.
- We must manage resources crucial to human welfare more effectively.
- We must stabilize population. This will be possible only if all nations recognize that it requires improved social and economic conditions, and the adoption of effective voluntary family planning.
- We must reduce and eventually eliminate poverty.
- We must ensure sexual equality, and guarantee women control over their own reproductive decisions.
- [This] global endeavor will require a great reduction in violence and war.
- A new ethic is required toward discharging our responsibility for caring for ourselves and for the earth.
- We need the help of many:
  - Scientists
  - Business and industrial leaders
  - Religious leaders
  - The world’s peoples.

**Source:** World Scientist’s Warning to Humanity—Union of Concerned Scientists, 1992.

### **Earth Summit: Agenda 21 and Rio Declaration**

#### **Language:**

Sustainable development, social and economic, environmentally sound management, conservation, “integration of environment and development concerns”

**Recommended Actions:**

Extensive and arranged in the broad topical areas of:

- Social and economic dimensions
- Conservation and management of resources for development
- Strengthening the role of major groups
- Means of Implementation

And, in the Rio Declaration are 27 Principles for establishing “a new and equitable global partnership” ... that recognizes “the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home.”

This document was an important pre-cursor for the Earth Charter.

**Source:** United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3 to 14 June 1992 and Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, A/CONF.151/26 (Vol. I)

**The Earth Charter, 2000**

Religious scholars and organizations also heavily influenced the development and promotion of the internationally focused *Earth Charter*, a consensus vision document of sixteen “interdependent principles for a sustainable way of life as a common standard by which the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions is to be guided and assessed” (Earth Charter Commission, 2000) The *Earth Charter* was sparked by and built upon earlier UN Declarations.

**Language:**

Sustainable way of life, change of mind and heart, “awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life,” respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, culture of peace

**Recommended Actions:**

The actions are specifically indicated for “the conduct of all individuals, organizations, businesses, governments, and transnational institutions”

- Respect and care for the community of life
- Ecological integrity
  - Protect and restore the integrity of the Earth’s ecological systems
  - Prevent harm as the best method of environmental protection and, when knowledge is limited, apply a precautionary approach
  - Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being
  - Advance the study of ecological sustainability
- Social and economic justice
  - Eradicate poverty
  - Ensure that economic activities and institutions at all levels promote human development in an equitable and sustainable manner.
  - Affirm gender equality and equity ... and ensure universal access to education, health care, and economic opportunity.
  - Uphold the right of all, without discrimination, to a natural and social environment...
- Democracy, nonviolence, and peace

- Strengthen democratic institutions at all levels
- Integrate into formal education and life-long learning the knowledge, values, and skills needed for a sustainable way of life.
- Treat all living beings with respect and consideration.
- Promote a culture of tolerance, nonviolence, and peace.

Within each of the broad commitments there are many specific actions that point to a sustainable way of life. Some of these (paraphrased from the Earth Charter) are illustrated below; many relate to actions addressed by ecological footprinting:

- Promote social and economic justice
- Adopt sustainable development plans and regulations (at all levels of society)
- Establish and safeguard “viable” nature and biosphere reserves
- Promote species and ecosystem recovery/restoration
- Control and eradicate non-native species, genetically modified organisms
- Use sustainability principles for renewable and non-renewable resources
- Consider life cycle consequences
- Practice pollution prevention
- Avoid military actions damaging to the environment
- Reduce, reuse, recycle
- Use restraint and emphasize efficiency and renewables for energy sources
- “Adopt lifestyles that emphasize the quality of life and material sufficiency in a finite world.”
- Prevent cruelty to animals
- “Support local, regional and global civil society and promote the meaningful participation of all interested individuals and organizations in decision making.”
- Strengthen local communities

**Source:** The Earth Charter Commission, *The Earth Charter: Values and Principles for a Sustainable Future*, 2000

### **United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2000**

#### **Language:**

Sustainable development

#### **Recommended Actions:**

- Fundamental values: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, shared responsibility
- From Part IV. “Protecting Our Common Environment”
  - Spare no effort to free all of humanity, especially children, “from the threat of living on a planet irredeemably spoilt by human activities” and from having insufficient resources
  - Affirm support of the principles of sustainable development outlined in Agenda 21
  - Adopt in all environmental actions “a new ethic of conservation and stewardship”
    - Kyoto Protocol
    - “Intensify our collective efforts for the management, conservation, and sustainable development of all types of forests”

- Fully implement: Convention on Biological Diversity and Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, particularly in Africa
- “Stop the unsustainable exploitation of water resources by developing water management strategies”
- “Intensify cooperation to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters”
- “Ensure free access to information on the human genome sequence”

**Source:** United Nations General Assembly, Resolution: United Nations Millennium Declaration, A/res/55/2, September 18, 2000

### **Statement on Climate Change: Evangelicals and Scientists on Global Climate Change, 2007**

#### **Language:**

Protection of creation; stewardship; blame placed on “unsustainable, irresponsible lifestyles and public policies” and the opposite is called for

#### **Recommended Actions:**

This letter is a first step, calling for cooperation between scientists and evangelicals and for improved stewardship.

**Source:** Statement on Climate Change: Evangelicals and Scientists on Global Climate Change, January 23, 2007, multiple signatories

### **Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Leaders Unite over Threat to Creation: An Open Letter to the President and Congress calling for immediate action on global warming (May 2007)**

#### **Language:**

Stewards, trustees of creation

#### **Recommended Actions:**

- Persuade legislators to take immediate action to curb greenhouse gases
- Place science-based mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions
- Begin by investing in renewable energy
- Embracing an ethic of conservation
- Prioritize a healthy environment

## **PERSONAL MEASURES**

### **Ecological Footprint**

The ecological footprint identifies the lifecycle resources used to provide human activities of food, transportation, housing, and general material consumption. By evaluating the ecological footprint of various choices, consumers are able to discern the most sustainable path—the choice with the smallest footprint is considered the most ecologically sound action. Based on this, recommended actions from the ecological footprint are:

- Consider a vegetarian diet (especially vegan) or low-meat/dairy diet
- Adopt a local foods ethic and avoid processed, packaged foods and those shipped long distances

- Reduce the amount of waste you generate (e.g., through composting, recycling, “pre”-cycling)
- Dramatically reduce your housing footprint; 500 square feet or less per person
- Implement green design/renovation principles in your house, especially regards energy efficiency and energy consumption
- Reduce your transportation footprint through staying at home more, consolidating trips, using mass transit, walking or bicycling
- If you have a car, get the cleanest and most fuel economic one possible

Others have adopted and modified the original ecological footprint quiz. One tool being promoted by Interfaith Power and Light and other church organizations is the *Low Carbon Diet*. Another, being shared within the Evangelical community, was developed by Dr. Matthew Sleeth and his wife Nancy (participants in this research study) and promoted through their nonprofit organization, *Blessed Earth* as they radically simplified their lives in response to their ecological conversion.

### **Low Carbon Diet**

- Reduce solid waste (recycling; reduce packaging by buying in bulk, precycling, stopping junk mail, bringing your own shopping bags)
- Reduce hot water use (low-flow showerheads, reduce shower time)
- Reduce water use for washing dishes (only full loads in the DW, handwash, make sure the faucet has an aerator)
- Wash and dry clothes efficiently (wear till dirty, full loads and cold water, clothesline)
- Turn down the heating thermostat
- Cool your house more efficiently
- Reduce the amount of vehicle miles traveled
- Drive earth smart (fuel efficient vehicles, driving style, auto maintenance)
- Improve your hot water heater
- Install energy efficient lighting
- Get a home energy audit
- Seal air leaks in the house
- Tune up (or replace) your furnace and seal/insulate warm air heating ducts
- Replace appliances with Energy Star rated
- Switch to renewable power
- Calculate your carbon footprint and go carbon neutral by planting trees and/or purchasing carbon credits.
- Spread the word: encourage others to go on a low carbon diet

### **Blessed Earth (The Sleeth’s) Energy Audit**

Examines fuel use, automobile use (miles driven, and mpg ratings), travel by other means (air, bus, train), gallons of gasoline used for other things (boats, lawn mowers, snowmobiles, etc), dollars spend for goods and services. They provide an accompanying “Earth Care To-Do List” that includes things like:

- Exploring the bible for earth-focused passages
- Praying
- Picking up trash
- Practical suggestions for reducing water use
- Reducing energy consumption when heating and cooling
- Washing clothes in cold water and using a clothesline
- Spend time in nature
- Turn off lights and electronics when not in use
- Honor the Sabbath
- Practical tips on reducing driving
- Practical tips on limiting consumerism
- Use energy efficient lighting, lightbulbs
- Recycle
- Purchase sustainably grown foods and drink
- Stop junk mail
- Use tree-free paper products
- Reduce meat consumption
- Avoid fast food restaurants
- Support faith-based organizations working to save “God’s created earth”
- Kick the paper habit: cloth bags, handkerchiefs, and cloth napkins
- Get rid of clutter (like unused clothes)
- Compost food and yard waste
- Become more conscious and deliberate in purchasing (wait and discern)
- Reach out to your church to take sustainability actions
- Buy locally grown and organic foods
- Insulate and air seal
- Stop phantom power leakages
- Volunteer time
- Plant trees
- Cut back on Christmas “frenzy”
- Create a pesticide and chemical free lawn
- Replace appliances as needed with Energy Star rated
- Start a vegetable garden
- Reduce amount of miles traveled
- Continue to work with your church and community on “creation care and stewardship”
- Conduct a home energy audit
- “Follow our grandmothers’ advice: ‘Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without.’”

### **Helen and Scott Nearing**

Do the best you can, whatever arises.

Be at peace with yourself.

Find a job you enjoy.

Live in simple conditions: housing, food, clothing; get rid of clutter.

Contact nature every day; feel the earth under your feet.  
 Take physical exercise through hard work; through gardening or walking.  
 Don't worry; live one day at a time.  
 Share something every day with someone else; if you live alone, write someone; give something away; help someone else.  
 Take time to wonder at life and the world; see some humor in life where you can.  
 Observe the one life in all things.  
 Be kind to the creatures.  
 Simplify and order life;  
 Plan ahead;  
 Follow the line resolutely;  
 Eliminate nonessential things;  
 Keep distractions to a minimum;  
 Live day by day, by bread labor, with nature, with people, establishing worthwhile contacts;  
 Collect and organize material (that provides an important record or substantiates ideas);  
 Do research and follow trends;  
 Write, lecture, and teach;  
 Keep in close contact with the class struggle (social justice);  
 Acquire an understanding of basic and cosmic forces, gradually uniting together a unified, integrated, poised personality that is constantly learning and growing.  
**Source:** Carroll, 2004, *Sustainability and Spirituality*

### **Wendell Berry**

(Writes of community sustainability, writing "[I]f the members of a local community want their community to cohere, flourish, and to last, these are some things they would do:

- 1) Always ask of any proposed change or innovation: What will this do to our community? How will this affect our common wealth?
- 2) Always include local nature—the land, the water, the air, the native creatures—within the membership of the community.
- 3) Always ask how local needs might be supplied from local sources, including the mutual help of neighbors.
- 4) Always supply local needs first. (And only then think of exporting their products, first to nearby cities, and then to others.)
- 5) Understand the unsoundness of the industrial doctrine of "labor saving" if that implies poor work, unemployment, or any kind of pollution or contamination.
- 6) Develop properly scaled value-adding industries for local products to insure that the community does not become merely a colony of the national or global economy.
- 7) Develop small-scale industries and businesses to support the local farm and/or forest economy.
- 8) Strive to produce as much of the community's own energy as possible.
- 9) Strive to increase earnings (in whatever form) within the community and decrease expenditures outside the community.
- 10) Make sure that money paid into the local economy circulates within the community for as long as possible before it is paid out.

- 11) Make the community able to invest in itself by maintaining its properties, keeping itself clean (without dirtying some other place), caring for its old people, teaching its children.
- 12) See that the old and the young take care of one another. The young must learn from the old, not necessarily and not always in school. There must be no institutionalized “child care” and “homes for the aged.” The community knows and remembers itself by the association of old and young.
- 13) Account for costs now conventionally hidden or “externalized.” Whenever possible, these costs must be debited against monetary income.
- 14) Look into the possible uses of local currency, community funded loan programs, systems of barter, and the like.
- 15) Always be aware of the economic value of neighborly acts. In our time the costs of living are greatly increased by the loss of neighborhoods, leaving people to face their calamities alone.
- 16) A rural community should always be acquainted with, and complexly connected with, community minded people in nearby towns and cities.
- 17) A sustainable rural community will be dependent on urban consumers loyal to local products. Therefore, we are talking about an economy that will always be more cooperative than competitive.

**Source:** Wendell Berry, *Another Turn of the Crank*, quoted in Carroll, *Sustainability and Spirituality*

### **Green Sister’s Actions** (From Carroll, 2004, pp. 62+)

“Theoretical concepts” that are common among these communities (per Carroll):

- Linkages to justice and the connection between social justice and eco-justice.
- Linkages to Christianity not only to the charism, cultural history, and practice of the individual order but also to the order’s founder, abstracted, and interpreted to support the ecological and eco-justice approach of the work at hand.
- Linkages to ecumenism, to ecumenical approaches, not only to and through all Christian denominations, but to and through interfaith linkages as well.
- Adherence to the basic principles of ecology.
- The linkage to the thought, ideas, and teaching of Thomas Berry and Miriam Therese MacGillis is wide, although attitudes toward advertising that fact vary.
- Reading nature as revelation—from Tom Berry, Aquinas, the psalms, and many other sources—a return of the not very common attitude of seeing Nature as a book of revelation side by side with Holy Scripture, as complementary to one another.

Putting all of these things together, Carroll painted his own list of “indicators of sustainability” that fall into the categories of housing, food, transportation, energy, consumption and waste, and education and outreach:

### **Housing**

- Stawbale passive solar house with solar hot water

### **Food**

- Sustainable, organic food production

- Permaculture and/or biodynamic agriculture
- Community supported agriculture
- Farmer's markets; local foods; avoidance of corporate food sources; preserving food (community kitchens); native species
- Eat lower on the food chain, often vegetarian

#### Transportation

- Reduction of private motor vehicle use
- Hybrid or other fuel efficient cars

#### Energy

- Major energy conservation techniques
- Active solar where possible; perhaps also wind power depending on site
- Radiant heat in the floors from solar power
- Compete avoidance of electric clothes dryers
- Wood stoves as appropriate, and wood pellet stoves in some areas
- High efficiency appliances (Energy Star)

#### Consumption and Waste Reduction

- Support local businesses
- Gray water system and roof and gutter cisterns (rain barrels)
- Constructed wetlands for sewage disposal
- Composting and low water toilets
- Composting all garden and yard wastes and all household organics
- No built-in garbage disposal
- Non-toxic products
- "Green" habits, used clothing, natural fiber clothing
- "Fasting" from television and other aspects of consumer culture

#### Education and Outreach

- Educational programming and teaching (offering internships, as well)
- Youth work, youth ministry, service education
- Social ministries, especially around the belief that "human healing (mental, physical, spiritual) can occur through healing the Earth"
- Ecological restoration work and land conservation

#### Spiritual Formation

- Celebration of solstices
- Ritual and prayer
- Retreat, hermitage
- Meditation

## **APPENDIX B.**

### **INITIAL NOMINATOR CONTACTS**

#### Environmental Organizations

- Chesapeake Bay Foundation (Roy Hoagland)
- Chesapeake Bay Program (Carin Bisland, Pat Devlin, Jack Greer, Kent Mountford, Kelly Shenk, Tom Simpson)
- Ecostewards Alliance (Peter Kelsey)

#### Academic Affiliates

- Joy Ackerman, Antioch University New England
- Mitch Thomashow, Unity College and Antioch University New England
- John Carroll, University of New Hampshire (through his studies of religious communities)
- Calvin DeWitt, University of Wisconsin and Director of Au Sable Institute
- Sarah McFarland, Northwestern University (through her studies of “green” sisters)
- Fred Taylor, Antioch University New England (and the Manitou Project)
- Mary Evelyn Tucker, Yale University
- Sallie McFague, retired from Vanderbilt University
- Reverend Sallie Bingham, Grace Cathedral and Regeneration Project

#### Religious/Spiritual Affiliates and Others

- Father Bill Sheehan, OMI
- Brother Maurice Lange, OMI
- Sister Gail Worcelo
- Sister Margaret Galiardi
- Sister Patricia Siemen
- Paul Gorman, National Religious Partnership for the Environment
- Joel Hill, Brattleboro
- Matthew and Nancy Sleeth, Blessed Earth
- Broadcast message to Brattleboro Area Interfaith Initiative

**APPENDIX C.**  
**NOMINATOR'S LETTER**

*Date, 2007*

*Contact Person*

*Input nominator's address here.*

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_,*

Subject: Seeking nominations for research **INTERVIEWS WITH ECOLOGICALLY ENLIGHTENED CHRISTIANS WHO DEMONSTRATE COMMITMENT TO A SUSTAINABLE WAY OF LIFE**

I am writing per the recommendation of \_\_\_\_\_ *[or provide some other appropriate opening (e.g., referencing the important work of their organization, my personal or professional connection with them, or their research and publications)]* to solicit your suggestions for potential interview candidates to include in my dissertation research project examining the formation of Christians that are recognized through their words and deeds to be ecologically conscious (enlightened) and committed to a sustainable way of life. I am particularly interested in how, if at all, spiritual formation practices contributed to their transformation. My research interest stems from multiple sources: professional, academic, and personal.

At present, I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Environmental Studies Department at Antioch University New England Graduate School. I am also a long-time (over twenty years) environmental consultant focusing on watershed planning and program implementation, including a strong emphasis on public participation, policy analysis, collaborative decision making, and environmental education. I inform and balance my vocational interests with a daily meditation practice and deep commitment to my personal spiritual formation. I am also actively and consciously trying to embody a sustainable way of life so that my ethics and actions are aligned.

With the intent of conducting research relevant academically, professionally, and personally, I am currently initiating a study of how ecologically conscious and sustainable Christians came to be that way. I desire to focus on the process of transformation that enabled them to turn from the dominant paradigm of consumerism and other non-sustainable practices toward a different path. Specifically, I am seeking to interview adult men and women across the spectrum of Christian involvement (e.g., laity, clergy, and members of religious communities) that you consider and who would self-identify as:

- **Christian or having a Christian orientation** to their spiritual path [Please note that if you know of candidates that are non-Christian, but that do have a faith perspective of any orientation, please submit those recommendations, as well; in the future I intend to extend my research to embrace an interfaith perspective.]

- **Ecologically enlightened** or committed to that path
- Consciously and actively committed to **pursuing a sustainable way of life**
- Actively **engaged in one or more spiritual practices**.

While I do not want to limit potential candidates by applying stringent criteria for sustainability and spiritual formation, I am seeking to interview those individuals that have moved beyond a base level of occasional spiritual dabbling and household recycling, to those that are consciously deepening their commitments in both realms, perhaps by engaging in a daily spiritual discipline like meditation or prayer and consciously modifying their consumer behavior to become more ecologically sustainable citizens (e.g., taking steps to reduce their ecological footprint).

In developing my own knowledge and ethical base around this topic, I have been greatly influenced by your work *[input something here that is personal about their research or organization so they know I've considered it]*. I would greatly appreciate your recommendations on potential research candidates for this study. These could include yourself, colleagues, friends, parishioners, church leaders, members of religious communities, retreatants, or others you may know.

After receiving and reviewing nominations, I will contact potential participants for a short, preliminary conversation. Depending on the outcome of the introductory sharing, I may ask permission to engage in a more detailed in-person or telephone interview.

In addition to nominations, if you know of any relevant studies or publications I should consult, other people I should talk with, or have any additional insights, I would be deeply grateful if you would share those as well. You may contact me through any means listed at the bottom of this letter, although email is my preferred method.

The attachment to this letter provides additional background on the problem I am hoping to address; the questions, methods, and goals forming my study; and some information on my personal history and interest in this topic. I greatly appreciate your time and consideration and look forward to communicating with you further about this topic.

With warm regards and many thanks for your time,

Cary Gaunt  
 Environmental Studies Ph.D. Candidate, Antioch University New England  
 Watershed Planning Consultant  
 P.O. Box 2113  
 Brattleboro, VT 05303  
 chg.watershed@gmail.com  
 802-257-5301

## **APPENDIX D.**

### **THE WAY OF ECOLOGICAL ENLIGHTENMENT CHRISTIAN PATHWAYS TO A SUSTAINABLE WAY OF LIFE RESEARCH SUMMARY**

**Cary H. Gaunt**  
**February 21, 2007**

#### **OVERVIEW**

This research project examines the formation of ecologically conscious Christians who are committed to a sustainable way of life. My focus is on the formation process in order to provide insights on how some people bridge the gap between theory and practice and are actually able to “walk the talk” of environmentally responsible living as called for by many religious, spiritual, scientific, and environmental initiatives and organizations despite immense social and cultural pressures to do otherwise. Hopefully the results of this work will inform spiritual and religious institutions and people seeking to embody a sustainable way of life, as well as environmental organizations and professionals wanting to develop new approaches and venues for addressing the underlying causes of unsustainable human behavior.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS, METHODS, AND GOALS**

By interviewing spiritually engaged Christians actually “walking the talk” of ecological sustainability, my dissertation research seeks to provide information relevant to moving the discourse from theological reflection to practice. I will employ the grounded theory methodology of qualitative research to analyze responses to a series of interview questions. The overarching research questions informing this study include:

- 5) How do ecologically enlightened Christians, committed to a sustainable way of life, come to be that way—how are they formed?**
- 6) What factors influenced their transformation towards ecological consciousness and commitment to sustainability? How were they able to move from theory to praxis?**
- 7) What role, if any, did spiritual formation disciplines/practices and/or religion have in supporting this formation?**
- 8) What clues might the formative journeys of these role models provide in developing a preliminary theory and recommendations for improved means of supporting the development of ecological enlightenment and sustainability practice among people of faith (e.g., ecological spiritual formation)?**

My hope is to identify and interview a diverse group of adult Christians who demonstrate in their “thoughts, words, and deeds” a commitment to a sustainable way of life, a commitment to spiritual practice, and who are considered role models of ecological enlightenment. I anticipate

interviewees will cover the spectrum of religious involvement and hope to identify representatives from church leadership, laity, and religious communities. This qualitative study will carefully evaluate transcripts and other content (e.g., observations, documents if provided by the interviewee) from in-depth interviews. While the focus of this research will be on Christians, my sincere hope is that the information gleaned from a thorough analysis of interview responses will lead to a preliminary theory, including specific lessons learned and helpful hints, which will assist others in moving closer to the praxis of living sustainable lives.

## **BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT**

### **Worsening Environmental Conditions Despite Decades of Restoration Effort**

It is disappointing and alarming to many that even after decades of effort, global environmental conditions continue to decline and threats to our natural world appear to be relentless and expanding. These challenges are well documented and are blamed on many sources. Yet, a closer look often indicates that the root of many of today's environmental challenges derives from, either directly or indirectly, human consumer behavior, lifestyles, and corresponding land use development and exploitation. Historic and current responses have tended to focus on "outer" measures spanning science, economics, policy, education and communication arenas (including regulations, comprehensive and strategic planning, cost-benefit analysis, biological monitoring, computer modeling, public outreach, and environmental mediation), while virtually ignoring the "inner" realm of personal decision making and the influence of disciplines like religion, spirituality, psychology, and philosophy in shaping ones' environmental views. These externally focused measures simply do not go far enough in addressing many of the foundational causes of environmental problems.

### **Disconnect Between the Theory and Practice of Sustainability**

Ever since historian Lynn White implicated the Christian church as providing "The Historical Roots of the Environmental Crisis", theologians, scholars, religious leaders, and lay people have been responding to his assertions and laying the groundwork for religious-based ethical concern for the environment. Two important consensus documents—a 1990 "Open Letter to the Religious Community" from over 30 prominent science leaders and the 1992 "Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment" from 150 religious and science leaders—provided even greater emphasis for that inquiry. Since then, countless scholarly works, conferences, and popular publications have explored sacred texts and other religious sources to establish a strong and credible foundation for ecological sustainability. Innumerable organizations, church-led policy efforts, congregational projects, and other efforts have emerged as a result of this call. Clearly, spiritual and religious entities have done much to increase their focus on and response to the environmental crisis.

Despite this good work, many scholars have commented on the apparent disconnect between the religious theory for environmental care and the actual practice of living ecologically sustainable lives. This disconnect appears to exist in two main ways:

- Disconnect in the academic literature and research
- Disconnect in the capacity of humans to reconcile the "gap between theory and practice, between ideas and action" (Tucker, 2003, p. 23).

### **Cultivating the Ecologically Enlightened Citizen**

As science, policy, economic, and technical efforts fall short of achieving environmental goals, more and more people are calling for greater attention to the religious, spiritual and psychological aspects of the environmental crisis. Echoing a need shared by many environmental programs, over 30 scientists from the Chesapeake Bay region, a watershed restoration initiative I am closely involved with in my professional work, issued a consensus report calling for, among other actions, **“cultivating a new ethic: the [ecologically] enlightened citizen”** (Boesch and Greer, 2003). Greater emphasis is being placed on identifying ways to “awaken” people to adopt more sustainable consumer behaviors and lifestyle choices and become more conscious and deliberate in their actions.

Learning how to live consciously—the end point of enlightenment, of awakening—is the realm of spirituality and religion. These disciplines play a vital role in crafting one’s ethical framework and overall worldview, and provide the basis for considering questions on how to live and the moral authority for making changes. In his book, *Spirituality and Sustainability*, author John Carroll (2004) concludes, “the environment is a religious question, a question of moral choice and spiritual values, and that it is a religious question more fundamentally than it is a scientific, economic, or political question. Hence, we must accept that its resolution will be found within the religious or spiritual realm” (Carroll, 2004, p. 14). Tucker and Grim (2000) in the Foreword to the Religions of the World and Ecology Conference Series offer a similar claim for religion, along with a cautionary note: “In summary, we recognize that religions have elements which are both prophetic and transformative as well as conservative and constraining (p.xx).”

The potential for religion and spirituality to transform lives and cultivate ecologically enlightened citizens is clear. As so many have noted, however, there remains a gap in the capacity of most people to “walk the talk” of ecologically responsible lives. This gap between theory and praxis is an area ripe for research.

My research focus is on the Christian community. While I am tempted to embrace an interfaith perspective, I am mindful of the need to limit my study and I also honor Buddhist Monk Thich Nhat Hahn’s wise counsel to “look deeply into your culture and tradition” and “you will discover many beautiful spiritual values” (Nhat Hanh, 2001, p. 132). There is much need to inform the Christian community on tangible ways to practice sustainable living and there are many opportunities.

The academic research exploring the lives of contemporary ecologically conscious Christians who are committed to a sustainable way of life is limited. The literature that does exist is valuable and growing, but thus far has focused primarily on case studies of religious communities that are trying to embrace sustainability (Carroll, 2004; Taylor, 1999 and 2007). I was unable to find a single study that rigorously mined the words and experiences of Christians to develop a theory of how they were able to move from theory to praxis.

### **PERSONAL STATEMENT**

In many ways, this research evolves out of my own spiritual journey and deepening commitment to sustainability. At a personal level, I am seeking to learn from those successfully embracing

sustainability so that I can take the final steps in fully embracing my ethical desires to live lightly upon the earth. From a professional and academic perspective, my hope is that the results of this work will provide a framework for ecologically oriented spiritual formation programs, recommend new venues and approaches for environmental public outreach and education programs, and improve the connection between environmental organizations and religiously and spiritually focused places (e.g., churches, retreat centers).

Doing this work is an expression of my life's calling to serve both Spirit and nature. From the moment I first plunged into the dirty waters of Abrams Creek in the northern Shenandoah Valley of Virginia at age fourteen while collecting samples at the effluent pipe of my hometown's sewage treatment plant, I've had a life-long connection with water. It's a passion that was born in me at an early age and has developed into an intimate and evolving relationship exploring the cavernous underground reaches of former submerged rivers and seeps to high alpine regions while tracing the source of "living waters." As long as I can remember, I've sought to align my interests in service of the resource I love so much.

In my over 20 year professional career I've sought to study, pursue, and promote the best ways to protect and restore water resources and have been blessed to work on projects in some of our Nation's premier watersheds: Chesapeake Bay, Columbia River Basin, Great Lakes, Lake Tahoe, and Cook Inlet, Alaska. My professional evolution, from Regulatory Analyst to Watershed Planner and Policy Analyst has provided me first hand experience with the history and evolution of federal and state water programs. I have had ample opportunity to experience and reflect upon what works and what doesn't.

Ironically, at one point in my career, I realized I was living in contradiction to the work I was pursuing. My work as a watershed planning consultant was all-consuming, had me traveling around the country and working excessively long hours, and I responded, in part, by making unconscious and unsustainable choices, especially in engaging in the kinds of consumer behavior I was recommending others modify. In short, I was not "walking the talk" of environmental sustainability.

A return to church and a renewed commitment to my own spiritual formation through daily meditation and prayer, annual fasts in the wilderness, and other practices helped me to right my course and renew my commitment to, what I consider to be, holistic sustainability—integrating and caring for my inner and outer ecologies. Like two channels of a braided river, my personal sustainability is akin to my spiritual journey—sometimes paralleling it, sometimes diverging, and ultimately connecting. My commitment to this work, personally and professionally, deepens as my own spiritual journey deepens.

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**APPENDIX E.**  
**PARTICIPANT LETTER**

November 1, 2007

*Dear \_\_\_\_\_,*

\_\_\_\_\_ recommended I contact you regarding my Ph.D. dissertation research on the relationship between spirituality and sustainability. Specifically, I am collecting information on factors that support one's transformation toward and commitment to an ecologically sustainable way of life. My specific research questions are:

- 1) How do ecologically enlightened and spiritually/religiously engaged adults, committed to a sustainable way of life, come to be that way—how are they formed? What was their journey?
- 2) What factors influenced their transformation towards ecological consciousness and commitment to sustainability? How were they able to move from theory to practice?
- 3) What role, if any, did spiritual formation disciplines/practices and/or religion have in supporting this formation?
- 4) What clues might the formative journeys of these role models provide in developing a preliminary theory and recommendations for improved means of supporting the development of ecological enlightenment and sustainability practice among spiritually and/or religiously committed people?

\_\_\_\_\_ nominated you for this study because: (1) she considers you to be ecologically enlightened, or committed to that path; (2) you are actively pursuing a sustainable way of life; (3) you routinely engage in spiritual practices and/or have a deep spiritual commitment.

This information collection effort is a critical piece of my doctoral research towards a degree in Environmental Studies at the Antioch University New England Graduate School in Keene, New Hampshire. It will also inform my environmental consulting career and volunteer work as an environmental educator and wilderness guide. I anticipate using the results of my research, in conjunction with the rest of my academic studies and long-standing professional experience as a water resources and watershed planning consultant, to develop new educational and outreach programs for spiritually focused people and organizations/institutions. These programs would focus on the integration of spiritual practice, ecological awakening, and pathways to sustainable living. Your participation in my research, especially as a spiritual person who is “walking the talk” of sustainability, will be incredibly valuable.

In addition to being professionally and academically relevant to me, this research is deeply personal. In many ways, this study evolves out of my own spiritual journey and deepening commitment to sustainability. At a personal level, I am seeking to learn from those successfully embracing sustainability so that I can take the final steps in fully embracing my ethical desires to live lightly upon the earth. Doing this work is an expression of my life's calling to serve both Spirit and nature.

I would like to take about 1-2 hours of your time to talk with you, in person or on the telephone, about your personal journey to ecological awakening and commitment to a sustainable way of life. Because I am interested in developing spiritually oriented sustainability programs, I would also like to talk with you about ideas and helpful hints you are willing to share with others seeking a deeper commitment to ecological sustainability.

Your experiences, knowledge, and reflections will provide valuable insights for my inquiry and I certainly hope you will be able to participate. I have attached an even more detailed project summary should you desire additional information. You may feel free to call or email me directly with questions or comments and to RSVP for this invitation to participate. I plan to follow up this letter with another communication in about 2 weeks. I appreciate your time and consideration and certainly hope to talk with you in the very near future.

Cary Gaunt  
Environmental Studies Ph.D. Candidate  
Antioch University New England Graduate School  
Watershed Planning Consultant  
chg.watershed@gmail.com  
802-257-5301

**APPENDIX F.**  
**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER**

Dear

As we have discussed, I am currently collecting information on how and why spiritually engaged people choose to live ecologically sustainable lives. This information collection effort is a critical piece of my doctoral research towards a degree in Environmental Studies at Antioch University New England Graduate School. Your participation in my research will be incredibly valuable. I am thrilled you have agreed to participate in my study.

This letter provides an overview of your rights as a research participant and indicates your voluntary willingness to be interviewed. Please read the remainder of the letter and sign at the bottom to indicate your voluntary willingness to join this study. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns at any time during this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at:

Cary Gaunt

Antioch University New England Graduate School

P.O. Box 2113

Brattleboro, VT 05303

chg.watershed@gmail.com

**Your Rights as a Research Participant**

As a research participant, I want to ensure you that I value and respect your time and your privacy. As a participant in this research, you have very definite rights:

1. This interview and your responses will be kept strictly confidential unless you specifically waive that right (e.g., would prefer to have your name used instead of a pseudonym).
2. Your participation is voluntary.
3. You are free to refuse to answer a question at any time.
4. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any time.

By agreeing to participate in this research, you agree to the following, and will sign my consent at the bottom of this form:

- ☐ I agree to participate in this research by being interviewed and will be available at the time, date, and place we agree upon and schedule.
- ☐ I agree to have this interview tape recorded. (However, if I feel uncomfortable, I may ask for this taping to stop at any time.)
- ☐ If necessary, I will be available for a follow up interview of about the same duration and am amenable to accept short telephone calls or emails to clarify points.
- ☐ I will review summaries (and possibly transcripts) of this interview for accuracy.

- ☐ I grant permission for this data (specifically the interview summaries and transcripts as developed) to be used for the process of completing a Ph.D. degree, including a dissertation and any other future publications (such as in an academic journal or book).
- ☐ I understand that my identity will be kept anonymous and that only a pseudonym of my choice will be used. If desired, I may request that my actual first name be used. If necessary to provide contextual information, some basic demographic information such as my gender, age, general information about my employment, and the general geographic location where I live, may be used.

**Informed Consent**

I have read over and understand the above information and willingly agree to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Cary Gaunt)

## APPENDIX G.

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Date and Time:

Interview Location:

Interviewee Name and Contact Information:

Mailing Address

City, State, Zip Code

Phone

Email

Interviewee Pseudonym or would you prefer I use your first name?

May I quote you in my dissertation and related publications?

**This Interview Guide contains the following four parts:**

- I. INTRODUCTIONS**
- II. BACKGROUND ON THE STUDY**
- III. INTERVIEW LOGISTICS**
- IV. QUESTIONS**

#### INTRODUCTIONS

- **Who am I?**
  - Cary Gaunt, presently living in Brattleboro, Vermont
  - Antioch University New England, Ph.D. Candidate in Environmental Studies
  - Long-time environmental consultant for myriad national and regional watershed initiatives, especially Chesapeake Bay, but also ones out West—Columbia River Basin, Lake Tahoe, Cook Inlet Alaska (related to Valdez Spill)
  - Wilderness guide, meditation group leader, teacher of voluntary simplicity, and personally committed to a spiritual path that includes a commitment to a sustainable way of life.
- **Who are you? Please say a little about yourself, highlighting your vocation, avocation, passions or other aspects that you would like mentioned in a short narrative description. I will ask more specific demographic questions at the end of our interview.**

#### STUDY BACKGROUND

- **What am I studying?** The life journeys and formative experiences (especially the role of spirituality and/or religion) of people who have made a demonstrable commitment to

ecological responsibility and a sustainable way of life and are considered role models by others.

- **Why am I studying this?**
  - My research responds to the call from so many scientific, environmental, religious, and spiritual entities to “cultivate ecologically enlightened citizens” (Note: This specific term came from an in-depth evaluation process, conducted by scientists and environmental managers, of the Chesapeake Bay Program’s restoration effort).
  - The topic is personally, professionally, and academically relevant for me:
    - Deepens my personal exploration of and commitment to sustainability
    - Supports my work in the world as a consultant to watershed organizations and other community groups on topics of ecological restoration and sustainability
    - Fills an important research gap—very few studies have explored the process of “becoming” sustainable and practically none have addressed the actual role of spirituality and/or religion in supporting that process.
- **How am I studying this?** Primarily through interviews using the grounded theory methodology of organizing and analyzing interview results. Our process during the interview will be to discuss a range of questions addressing your journey towards sustainability and the role of spirituality and/or religion in supporting (or impeding) that journey. I will take notes and tape record these interviews. At the end of our time together, I will prepare summaries of your responses for each question—I will not attempt to capture your exact words in their entirety, but will capture complete phrases, specific words and ideas, and hopefully accurately reflect the main points of each response. I will type these responses up into a blank interview form and send them to you for your final review and comment. Your reviewed responses will provide the basis for my results and provide information that I will analyze and compare to the reviewed responses from other interviews. Using the categorization and coding process of grounded theory, I will discover common themes shared among all interviewees.

## INTERVIEW LOGISTICS

- **Amount of time:** Approximately 1-1.5 hours
  - **Before we begin, it is important that we go over:**
    - **Participants’ Rights as summarized on the Informed Consent Form, making sure you understand and have signed the Informed Consent Form**
    - **Any questions.**
- 

## QUESTIONS BY TOPIC

Questions are arranged by the following topics:

- Open-ended questions about your journey toward sustainability and the possible role of spirituality and religion
- More focused questions on:
  - Sustainability practices
  - Supports, barriers, and summary thoughts

- Demographic information.

## **Introductions**

**How would you like to be described in my dissertation?**

## **Your Sustainability Journey**

**1. Please tell me about your own journey towards and commitment to an ecologically enlightened/ sustainable way of life?** This is an open-ended question, but the following categories provide potential probes:

- k. Influential experiences
- l. Numinous encounters or other times of revelation
- m. Connection to nature
- n. Role models or mentors
- o. Family influence/experiences
- p. Educational experiences
- q. Books, stories, or events
- r. Times of reflection
- s. Role of ritual, ceremony
- t. Rule of life, creed, personal philosophy, guiding norms, personal plan

**2. Clarifying and deepening questions if they are not covered in the preceding response:**

- g. When did you first become interested in sustainability?
- h. How did you happen to become interested? How did you get started on your journey? Could you describe the event or events that led up to this conscious commitment for you? Were there any particular formative experiences?
- i. Was there a precipitating event—a tipping point so to speak—that prompted this interest?
- j. What role, if any, did “life crisis” or a period of “forced introspection” play in your decision to become more sustainable?
- k. How long have you been attempting to live a sustainable life?
- l. Can you describe (or, is there anything else you would like to add about...) your progression from less to more sustainable?

**3. Some have described this kind of journey as an awakening, as becoming enlightened, or as an ecological conversion. Was this what it was like for you? Please elaborate.** What does that mean to you? Was there an inner transformation? Can you describe it?

- a. Probe: How would you describe the person you were before you became interested in sustainability? How would you describe the person you are now that you are consciously pursuing sustainability?
- b. How have your “stories,” your “operating paradigms” changed?
- c. What most contributed to this change?

**3A. NEW QUESTION: Is there any relationship between your ecological conversion and your religious conversion?**

**NEW QUESTION: WHAT BELIEFS, THEOLOGICAL OR OTHERWISE, ARE THE FOUNDATION FOR YOUR JOURNEY TOWARD AND COMMITMENT TO A SUSTAINABLE WAY OF LIFE?**

**4. What about the relationship between your ecological enlightenment and sustainability journey and social justice issues? Do you see a relationship? How do you address, if at all, the relationship? Has one informed the other?**

**The Role of Spirituality, Religion, Spiritual Formation**

I'd like to get a bit more specific about the process of your journey. So many are completely unconscious and of those that become conscious, so many struggle to match their actions with their desires and intentions.

**5. Have you noticed a relationship between your inner condition (you might consider it "inner sustainability") and your ability to take on outward actions of sustainability? Please elaborate.**

**NEW QUESTION: Please describe your faith. Is your faith derived from a belief in God? In Jesus?**

**NEW QUESTION: How has your faith contributed to your decision to pursue sustainability?**

**6. Please describe your spirituality, spiritual practice(s) and level of engagement?**

- a. Growing up with your family
- b. Now

**7. How has spirituality contributed to your decision to pursue sustainability? What specific practices contributed? Probes include:**

- a. Meditation
- b. Intentional time in nature
- c. Fasting (e.g., contemporary vision quest)
- d. Nature-focused depth work, like Soulcraft, Joanna Macy's work
- e. Solitude, retreat
- f. Study
- g. Yoga and/or other forms of embodied spiritual expression
- h. Art and music

**8. Please describe your religious affiliation and level of engagement:**

- a. Growing up with your family
- b. Now

**9. How has religion contributed to your decision to pursue sustainability? What specific practices contributed? Probes include:**

- a. Worship
- b. Church education programs
- c. Rituals and celebrations
- d. Sabbath
- e. Spiritual formation programs
- f. Scripture
- g. Prayer
- h. Church as model (e.g., membership in a green place of worship)

**NEW QUESTION: HAS YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON YOUR FAITH, SPIRITUALITY, AND/OR RELIGION CHANGED SINCE YOUR COMMITMENT TO A SUSTAINABLE WAY OF LIFE, SINCE YOUR ECOLOGICAL AWAKENING?**

**Examples of Sustainable Practices, Supports, Barriers, and Summary Thoughts**

**10. For illustrative purposes, can you describe in what ways do you feel that you lead a sustainable life?**

- a. Probes include:
  - i. Food
  - ii. Material goods
  - iii. Shelter
  - iv. Energy
  - v. Transportation
  - vi. Money
  - vii. Other
- b. Another probe: What sustainability measures are you most proud of?

**11. How about examples of where you are not sustainable? Please comment about these. In what areas do you struggle with your commitment to lead a sustainable life? Where would you like to improve?**

**12. By what standards or criteria do you measure whether or not you are sustainable (e.g., ecological footprint quiz)?**

**13. How do you think you were you able to move from the idea of living sustainably to action when so many struggle to make that jump?**

**14. How do you sustain yourself on this journey because it is not an easy path?**

**15. What supports you in your efforts to be sustainable?**

**NEW QUESTION: SOME HAVE ATTRIBUTED THIS TO GRACE. DOES THAT SPEAK TO YOU? WHAT DOES GRACE MEAN FOR YOU AND FROM WHERE IS IT DERIVED? HOW DO YOU CULTIVATE IT?**

**16. What support would you have liked along the way? What would have made it easier for you? Or, would make it easier for you now?**

**17. What inhibits you? What barriers do you run into?**

**18. What do you think are the most important ways to/actions to take to (1) embody an ecologically conscious path, (2) maintain this path, and (3) encourage others to embark on the path?**

**19. Do you have any thoughts on how environmental organizations might develop effective programs and/or other ways of reaching out to places and people having a religious/spiritual focus—or other venues—to support the “cultivation of ecological enlightenment?”**

**20. In summary, what most motivates your desire to live sustainably? What most blocks you?**

#### **Additional Contacts**

**21. Are there any particular source materials (such as books, people, quotes, other) that inform your pursuit of sustainability? Do you have role models (living or historic)?**

**22. Have you written anything about your journey that is relevant to this topic that you would be willing to share? Have others written about you?**

**23. Please provide the name of one other person/family I might want to consult for this study.**

#### **Demographic Information**

Please describe your:

- Ethnic background
- Family status
- Gender
- Age
- Educational background
- Employment
- Annual income (just as a range; check one):
  - < \$40,000
  - \$40,000-80,000
  - > \$80,000

- Is there anything else you would like to add about anything we've covered today?

**NEW QUESTION: ANY QUESTIONS I SHOULD HAVE ASKED THAT I DID NOT?**

Thank you so much for your time and consideration of these questions. In a few weeks, I hope to have a summary of responses prepared and submitted to you for your review.

## APPENDIX H.

### SUMMARY OF PARALLEL LITERATURE

**Table H-1. Formation Themes from the Literature**

<b>Schauffler (2003)</b>	<b>Scherch (1997)</b>	<b>Degenhardt (2002)</b>	<b>Judkins (2004)</b>	<b>Vickers (2003)</b>	<b>Dowdall (1998)</b>
Remembrance: Strong childhood connection to nature; mentors	Childhood memories in nature; mentoring	Positive, childhood role model.		Childhood time in nature; mentoring	Exceptional nature experiences, often beginning in childhood
Reflection: Enforced introspection		Reflection on one's habits; responding to uneasy feelings		Loss of special natural places	
Revelation: Moments of connection to the "larger mystery"				Spirituality	Taoist perspective; spiritual perspective about life
Reciprocity: Conscious connection with natural world	Early environmental awareness	Empathic connection with others and with destroyed nature. Intensive nature experiences.	Fostering family and children's environmental connection		Exceptional and mystical/unitive experiences occurring in natural contexts
Resistance: Activist posture	Resistant, activist perspective	Concern about oneself and others, and the environment.	Concern for the environment	Activism and social justice	Personal responsibility
Ritual: Rituals and ceremonies to support connection	Spirituality—seeking alternative religious practices and spiritual connections with nature				Spirituality
		Values and moral obligation; desire to be authentic	Good health for family members		Psychological well-being

Schauffler (2003)	Scherch (1997)	Degenhardt (2002)	Judkins (2004)	Vickers (2003)	Dowdall (1998)
		(psychic sustainability)			
		Desire to give meaning to life.	Quality family relations		
			Being part of a community		

## OTHER LITERATURE:

### Back-to-the-Land

Spirituality (but not necessarily traditional religion) was big motivator for those going “back to the land” (Gould, 1997 and 1999)

### Simplicity Literature – Mixed results regarding spirituality

Elgin (1993)—Spiritual-psychological motivation was key; 88% of 500 respondents were involved in an inner-growth process.

Less so with Pierce’s respondents (2006)—Her respondents more motivated by presence of stress and lack of time. BUT, 70% had a regular spiritual practice and 27% were motivated to simplify as result of inner growth and/or spirituality. Pierce also concludes: **“Do whatever you need to do to connect with a sense of spirit in your life, whether it be prayer, religious services, journal writing, meditation, or spiritually-related reading.** Simplicity leads to spirituality; spirituality leads to simplicity. Cultivate a practice of silence and solitude, even for 15 to 30 minutes a day. Your spirituality will evolve naturally.”

Zavestoski (2002) found that the driving forces behind an interest in voluntary simplicity shifted in the late 1990’s when simplicity themes in the popular literature moved from an earlier focus on the spiritual/religious virtues of simplicity (p. 153) to one of “peoples’ feelings of overwhelming stress, and their desire to find meaning in their consumption-driven, hectic lives” (p. 153). Huneke (2005): identified simplifiers as having a strong commitment to ecological and social responsibility; community; and maintaining a spiritual life (p. 527).