



**Standing in Solidarity with Earth**

# **Miriam Therese MacGillis: Imagining a New Earth Community Talks to the Loretto Community, August 2016**

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## **2020 Study Group Dates**

All sessions will be held at 6 PM ET / 5 PM CT / 4 PM MT / 3 PM PT via Zoom

For registration information, contact Jessie Rathburn: [jrathburn@lorettocommunity.org](mailto:jrathburn@lorettocommunity.org)

- January 8, 2020:** A Deep Worldview, Part 1  
Opening Ritual: Loretto Earth Network
- January 15, 2020:** A Deep Worldview, Part 2  
Opening Ritual: Latin America / Caribbean Committee
- January 29, 2020:** Genesis Farm: A Process of Reinvention, Part 1  
Opening Ritual: Loretto Link
- February 5, 2020:** Genesis Farm: A Process of Reinvention, Part 2  
Opening Ritual: Loretto at the UN
- February 19, 2020:** Restoring Paradise, One Watershed at a Time, Part 1  
Opening Ritual: Loretto Outreach Team
- February 26, 2020:** Restoring Paradise, One Watershed at a Time, Part 2  
Opening Ritual: TBD
- March 11, 2020:** Q&A, Part 1  
Opening Ritual: Loretto Volunteers
- March 18, 2020:** Q&A, Part 2  
Opening Ritual: TBD

# Session I: A Deep Worldview, Part 1



Follow this link: [bit.ly/LC-Session1](https://bit.ly/LC-Session1)  
0:00-30:38

## Session Overview:

- Relationship of Scripture to New Cosmology
- Human adaptability and denial
- Shifting a paradigm: understanding Earth on Earth's terms
- Earth in human form

## Notes:

Due to technical difficulties, the first several minutes of Miriam's have been omitted. Following is a summary of her main points:

This series of meditations on the New Story may seem familiar to those who began studying the writings of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme some twenty years ago. Miriam Therese MacGillis makes a strong case for revisiting them now in this time of deepening crisis for Earth in all her manifestations.

We may have forgotten, for instance, that we were going to follow Thomas Berry's advice to "put the Bible on the shelf for ten years and study the new cosmology." Remember, we were going to be able to see the Second Book of Revelation (the Bible) with new eyes after immersing ourselves in the First Book, the revelation of the Divine through the Universe itself.

Rather than patch the new cosmology somehow onto our traditional theology and continue on with little changed, she suggests we must become so well versed in the new cosmology that we revisit our old story from an entirely new consciousness, understanding its proper context in the overall pattern and story of Earth within the Universe.

## Supplemental Resources:

"Ecological Conversion" Paul Elie  
[emergencemagazine.org/story/ecological-conversion/](https://emergencemagazine.org/story/ecological-conversion/)

"The Intimate Universe" Thomas Berry,  
Loretto Magazine 1993  
[lorettocommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Intimate-Universe.pdf](https://lorettocommunity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Intimate-Universe.pdf)

"Creative Energy" in The Dream of the Earth,  
Thomas Berry (1988)

## Discussion Questions

1. What do you understand Thomas to have been talking about when he said to put the Bible on the shelf for ten years? What have we lost and what have we gained by disregarding that advice?
2. "We are standing between the past and the future, not sure that there will be seven generations after us. We are the first generation that has had to deal with that reality. And we know this is because humans are out of sync with how the natural world works and are bringing down the immune system of the whole of the natural world. It isn't a small moment in how we think and decide for the future. The implications are huge. We're gambling with the whole of the past."

How do you feel when MTM articulates that we are the generation that is presiding over one of the most critical moments in the possibility of Earth surviving? What impact does this have on you? How would you like faith communities to respond to this reality?

3. Are all humans equally culpable for the crises facing Earth Community? How does this question inform our possible responses to the crises?
4. Miriam calls us to understand Earth on Earth's terms, to shift our paradigm from the human-centered Western worldview to an Earth-centered worldview. This shift is, Miriam says, the greatest challenge we have.

How have you noticed this shift in your life? In our community? How do we continue making this shift together?

5. "Earth is the context of our being; we are derived from Earth's journey... Earth as mosquito, Earth as Zika virus, Earth as you..."

How does this view alter your perception of your place in the world?

6. Miriam states that if there's going to be a chance for life to come for seven generations, our species has got to do this work of reinventing everything about ourselves. What might this work entail?

# Session I: A Deep Worldview, Part 2



Follow this link: [bit.ly/LC-Session1](https://bit.ly/LC-Session1)  
30:38-54:18

*The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human,  
at the species level,  
with critical reflection,  
within the community of life systems,  
in a time-developmental context,  
by means of story and shared dream experience.*

- "The Great Work", Chapter 14: Reinventing the Human (Thomas Berry)

## Session Overview:

- Reinventing the human
- Soul subjectivity as a property of the universe
- Understanding bioregional contexts

## Supplemental Resources:

"Reinventing the Human" by Thomas Berry:  
[ecoziocstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/  
Reinventing-the-Human.2003-09-03.pdf](https://ecoziocstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Reinventing-the-Human.2003-09-03.pdf)

"The Spirituality of the Earth" Thomas Berry  
[ratical.org/many\\_worlds/SpiritOfEarth.pdf](https://ratical.org/many_worlds/SpiritOfEarth.pdf)

## Discussion Questions

1. Miriam says that we have invented the **meanings** of who humans are, and that we basically agree on these meanings.

What are some of the **meanings** that we understand as what it means to be human? (State the understandings, whether or not you think they need to change.)

2. What does it mean for there to have been soul subjectivity in the universe from the beginning, to have it as a property of the universe that expresses itself in greater complexity of form?
3. Miriam talks of a **shared dream experience** – the deep intuitive capacity we have to continue to imagine and to dream and envision what is the possibility that can still happen. What is the Motherhouse going to look like? What is the presence of Loretto on these lands capable of expressing ten years from now? Forty years from now? What would your dreams enable to happen? This is the core of what we're all called to: to reinvent the human.

Discuss this idea of a shared dream experience. Spend some time dreaming and imagining together.

4. Spend some time reflecting on Thomas Berry's quote from "The Great Work". Which phrases stand out to you? What comes to mind? What does it mean to reinvent the human at the species level?

# Session II: Genesis Farm – A Process of Reinvention, Part 1



Follow this link: [bit.ly/LC-Session2](https://bit.ly/LC-Session2)  
0:00-22:17

## Session Overview:

- The history and evolution of Genesis Farm
- Lessons learned from "Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire" by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker
- Death as a change of form

## Supplemental Resources:

"The Religious Value of the Unknown" George Prochnik [emergencemagazine.org/story/the-religious-value-of-the-unknown/](https://emergencemagazine.org/story/the-religious-value-of-the-unknown/)

## Discussion Questions

1. Spend some time thinking and discussing: What are the implications of the Universe Story?
2. Miriam talks about paradise as creating the conditions in which one lives with the highest possible fulfillment and satisfaction.  
  
What does this idea of paradise say about our lives today?
3. Think about the many changes in form that you/we have experienced/are experiencing. How does it feel to think of death as a change of form? What can we learn from this?
4. What does it mean for us that nothing can leave or die out of the universe?

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# Session II: Genesis Farm – A Process of Reinvention, Part 2



Follow this link: [bit.ly/LC-Session2](https://bit.ly/LC-Session2)  
22:17-55:43

## Session Overview:

- Physical changes at Genesis Farm: Land as Teacher
- Redesigning space through the Principles of Wholeness (Christopher Alexander)
- Including the Ancestors

## Supplemental Resources:

"Little Things Mean A Lot" by Herman Greene: [ecoziostudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Greene.Little-Things-Mean-a-Lot.ER\\_.2019-506.final\\_.pdf](https://ecoziostudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Greene.Little-Things-Mean-a-Lot.ER_.2019-506.final_.pdf)

"Call for Ecozoic Societies" by Herman Greene: [ecoziostudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Call-for-Ecozoic-Societies.2003-01-12.rev\\_.2014-06-05.pdf](https://ecoziostudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Call-for-Ecozoic-Societies.2003-01-12.rev_.2014-06-05.pdf)

## Discussion Questions

1. Miriam gave many examples of how those at Genesis Farm began to let the land be teacher. What resonated with you? What questions did this bring up within you?  
  
How can we begin to position ourselves as students of the land? What might change?
2. Miriam describes the Valley of Aluna, particularly as seen from above. The water is coming from the evolutionary process of Deep Time, flowing through the Valley of Aluna, and then going on to the Delaware River, in total threat of being contaminated by fracking. "On the one hand we have the gift and on the other its fate. What does it *really* mean for seven generations in the future?"  
  
Discuss. What are the implications for our lives?
3. Reflect on how Christopher Alexander (architect) and those at Genesis Farm tried to take principles of Earth and use them in design.

# Session III: Restoring Paradise, One Watershed at a Time, Part 1



Follow this link: [bit.ly/LC-Session3](https://bit.ly/LC-Session3)  
0:00-18:49

## Session Overview:

- Growing food in the Valley of Aluna: Biodynamics
- Ritual site for the eight seasonal passages: paying attention to what the natural world is doing

## Supplemental Resources:

"The Determining Features of the Ecozoic Era" by Thomas Berry  
[ecozoicstudies.org/ecozoic/2014/the-determining-features-of-the-ecozoic-era/#](https://ecozoicstudies.org/ecozoic/2014/the-determining-features-of-the-ecozoic-era/#)

"Dwelling on Earth" by Jay Griffiths  
[emergencemagazine.org/story/dwelling-on-earth/](https://emergencemagazine.org/story/dwelling-on-earth/)

## Discussion Questions

1. Miriam described how they found insights about their land through the process of going through a dark period of searching and letting go of everything that was secure, familiar, and understandable...a gentle, quiet unfolding, but not easy at all.

What does this bring up for you? Have you had similar experiences? Reflect on this together.

2. Miriam talked of the climate crisis, how its effects are being manifested currently, and how unprepared we are. In her reflecting on gardening, farming, and food systems, what stood out to you? Discuss.

3. In selecting a ritual site and celebrating the eight seasonal passages, those at Genesis Farm are trying to pay attention to what the natural world is doing and live into an evolving spirituality of humans who are trying to reinvent themselves as one species among many.

What is the importance of this? What role does ritual play in this evolution?

4. The morning prayer at Genesis Farm is meant "to evoke inside ourselves the desire and the capacity to be in alignment with everything Earth is doing, how it wants to go on living, and how we can be part of that... It is a desire to be in alignment with what's already there."

How does this idea of prayer resonate (or not) with you?

# Session III: Restoring Paradise, One Watershed at a Time, Part 2



Follow this link: [bit.ly/LC-Session3](https://bit.ly/LC-Session3)  
18:49-55:45

## Session Overview:

- Pilgrimage through the Valley of Aluna
- Discovering the sacred watershed
- Addiction and Earth as self-healing

## Supplemental Resources:

Charles Eisenstein video - Climate: A New Story  
[youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=225&v=DYQKLrbiCDE&feature=emb\\_logo](https://youtube.com/watch?time_continue=225&v=DYQKLrbiCDE&feature=emb_logo)

## Discussion Questions

1. Share what you know of your own watershed. What ideas do you have about how you can recover your watershed?
2. *What comes out of the evolutionary process is utterly sacred; the desecration is because our meaning systems are so distorted.*

Where do you see this distortion in our meaning systems?

3. Thomas Berry wrote of how our major institutions foster addiction and how this behavior contributes to the destruction of the planet. At their foundation, these institutions are committed to the belief that the human is separate from all else.

How have you experienced or witnessed this? How can we begin to break this dependency?

4. What is stirring inside you? What possibilities do you feel?

# Session IV: Q&A, Part 1



Follow this link: [bit.ly/LC-Session4](https://bit.ly/LC-Session4)  
0:00-28:50

## Session Overview:

- Sustainable Construction
- Land Preservation
- Earth-centering rituals in urban areas
- Environmental Justice: re-establishing a conservation corps

## Supplemental Resources:

"Definition of Ecological Civilization" by Herman Greene  
[ecoziocstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Definition-of-Ecological-Civilization.2010-10-10.pdf](https://ecoziocstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Definition-of-Ecological-Civilization.2010-10-10.pdf)

## Discussion Questions

1. What did you learn? What stood out to you?
2. In reflecting on straw-bale construction and composting toilets, Miriam tells religious communities to "get out there, show it can be done, and do it well!"

Why is it important for religious communities to take this step?

3. Miriam referenced how we "need a fortune to die" and that we should take a long, hard look at the type of care we think we should get. She also states that this is not what most people on the planet can afford, but we still feel we're entitled to it.

Reflect on this. What is she referring to? What are your thoughts on this? What are the implications of the way we die?

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# Session IV: Q&A, Part 2



Follow this link: [bit.ly/LC-Session4](https://bit.ly/LC-Session4)  
28:50-1:02:57

## Session Overview:

- Holding land in common
- Patriarchy within Catholicism
- Celtic Christianity

## Supplemental Resources:

"Our Way into the Future: Guides from The Great Work by Thomas Berry"  
[www.ecoziocstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Thomas-Berry-Guides-to-the-Future.2010-07-05.pdf](https://www.ecoziocstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Thomas-Berry-Guides-to-the-Future.2010-07-05.pdf)

"A Spirituality for the Ecozoic Era" by Julie Purcell (pp. 8-16) [ecoziocstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Ecozoic\\_Reader\\_Vol.2\\_No4\\_Summer-Fall\\_2002.pdf](https://ecoziocstudies.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Ecozoic_Reader_Vol.2_No4_Summer-Fall_2002.pdf)

## Discussion Questions

1. What did you learn? What stood out to you?
2. Miriam says that we should be countercultural to land ownership and monopolization. What might this look like? What do you think about this?
3. Miriam talks about fitting faith into the Universe Story. What does this look like? How have you done this?