

Meeting Thomas

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Barbara O'Donnell, H.M., is a Sister of the Humility of Mary from Villa Maria, PA. Through the ministry of EcoSpirituality and EcoJustice, she integrates a cosmic worldview in presentations, workshops, retreats, and rituals; and also invites reflection on the meaning of humility. She is a member of Sisters of Earth and other networks that affirm the relationship between spirituality and sustainability.



As I pulled my copy of *The Dream of the Earth* from the shelf, it was opened with intentionality, knowing that I would see the brief handwritten message from Thomas Berry: “To Barbara—in the Great Dream! Tom Berry August 1994.” Within seconds, a flood of memories surfaced and a prayer of reminiscence invited further reflection about *what Thomas Berry means to me*. I had read the book in preparation for spending time at Genesis Farm. It now shows signs of being reread and referenced many times over.

The second Sisters of Earth Conference at Grailville in Loveland, Ohio in 1996 deepened my appreciation of Thomas. His attentive attitude, as he shook my hand, is indelible in my mind. He thanked me for inviting him (in the name of the committee) to be the main speaker that year. Our planning committee was thrilled that he had said yes. It was a privilege to have him with us to move forward with the energy from the 1994 Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania gathering. Attendance had more than doubled since that first meeting and the Universe Story motivated a remarkable experience with the theme, *Ever Living Fire*.

Thomas invited a small group of us to sit under a large tree to talk about what was happening in our lives and what we hoped for during our time together. I do not remember any of the dialogue; yet I clearly recall the scene...Thomas leaning against the tree with his legs stretched out and, at times, his head uniquely tilted, indicative of his intense listening. How simple, how special, how significant to be part of a process, a conversation circle, that assisted me in realizing more profoundly that Earth's story is my story...our story. He smiled easily and shared a genuine laugh, an expression of our “celebratory species.”

With a shift in language and worldview, with interrogative and declarative sentences, my journey of intimacy with all life communities continues. Quoting Thomas is common for me. His words penetrate and their meaning permeates my life and ministry. Thomas remains an inspiration. He provides a glimpse of the humility to which we are all called. I am filled with never-ending gratitude.