

Invitation to Ecozoic Conversation Pods

Supporting One Another as We Learn to Foster New Relationships
with Our Living Earth and Humankind

Michael Powell

Editor's Note: The information below will be posted on CES's website to inform people how they may start or join an Ecozoic Conversation Pod. All or portions of this may also be sent out as an email with a cover note to invite people to form or join a conversation pod.



A “pod:” a dry dehiscent pericarp or fruit that is composed of one or more carpels.

A “pod:” a usually small group of people (such as family members, friends, coworkers, or classmates) who regularly interact closely with one another.

How are we to live well with our Living Earth and all her beings?

This is the question we are asking. We ask because we understand we are not well. Suffering is happening on a planetary scale from climate change and its effects, access to fresh water, disruptions of food supplies for all species, widespread species extinction, and materialistic, consumptive hyper-individualism, and geopolitical conflict. These planetary disruptions are expressed in a variety of ways seen locally, regionally, and globally that impact human and non-human life, individually and collectively. All life is being impacted; all life is threatened.

The intransigence of the various systems we have been operating within no longer offer ways of living that will pull us through to a future that is thriving, equitable, and dynamic. Our political, societal, and economic systems and structures are fearfully twisted beyond fixes at the margins. Our entanglements make us unsure what we should

do to bring about the transformational changes that are needed. We know new ways of living are needed.

How are we to live well with our Living Earth and all her beings?

The question is open-ended. The time is now to explore with curiosity and creativity possible modes of experiencing and responding that allow us to hear the cries of our Living Earth and act. Those cries of pain, injury, illness, and suffering are our own.

In conversation pods, we gather to explore this open-ended question. We learn from one another and help one another discover the new awarenesses, the new wisdoms, the new knowledge, and the expanded love needed to create new relationships with the great diversity of life that is our Living Earth. We dialogue on how we can bring about mutually enhancing ways of living in what is certain to be a turbulent time of transition or decline. We recognize a New Story is needed as the old story that provided guidance for living is no longer viable for what we now know lies ahead.

The good news . . .

The good news is that we are not alone in exploring what it means to live well with our Living Earth and all of her beings. If you are on this website, you have probably read some of the wisdom that has already been generated. We are called to build this conscious awareness within ourselves and live it within the larger society. We each have a sphere of influence by the nature of whom we are connected with and to. Do I reflect through my actions my efforts to live well with our Living Earth and all of her beings? How much do I reflect business as usual? How do I make my life count in a time of uncertainty and perpetual change?

The Conversation Pods are designed to help each of us consciously live more from new insights of living well and less from business as usual. Business as usual is a state of human mind that objectifies our Living Earth and all her beings in its relationships; and living well invites communion and collaboration with humans and all living beings in relationships.

Conversation Pods are lightly structured. They are spaces in which to share insights concerning what seems to have worked in living well within the new, existentially needed worldview/paradigm. They generate conscious conversations that allow people to explore deeper aspects of themselves and their relationships. They encourage exploring past, present, and future from perspectives of storytelling, learning, imagining, and acting. Vibrant conversation pods build community and enable participants to gain knowledge, wisdom, hope, and courage.

The conversations

Conversation Pods may take many different approaches to exploring the emerging Ecozoic era. Three primary arenas of interest are being activated through the Pods:

1. We are developing a New Story that integrates the various areas of physical and social sciences, geobiological and human history, religion, philosophy, wisdom, and cultural expressions in regard to the evolutionary development of our Living Earth and humanity's place in it.
2. We are coming to know our bioregion, the interdependent animate and inanimate community with which we share life. Our bioregion is our new "local" for it is where we are rooted. Our bioregion gives us greater understanding of how the health of this community is intertwined with our own.
3. We, individually and collectively, are cultivating ecological spirituality. Thomas Berry states, "Earth is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects." Living this reality, informed by our spiritual and humanistic traditions, gives us a way of being present to our Living Earth's intrinsic nature and value. In this encounter with sacredness, we experience renewed meaning and purpose.

Suggested Conversation Pod areas of focus

Here are some suggestions of topics with which your conversations might sprout, then grow! We offer these only to stimulate your interest in forming or joining a Conversation Pod. Regardless of where you begin, conversations will likely be free-flowing and go in many directions. Ecozoans are attempting to birth new ways of knowing, being, and doing. Meeting regularly as a Conversation Pod is an ecologically, spiritually energetic practice in itself.

- Explore practices needed to stimulate new openings into the Ecozoic.
- Adopt a contemplative approach by offering specific readings related to ecological spirituality.
- Form a book club that explores ways to live in mutually enhancing relationships among humans and the larger community of life.
- Have each participant present a program that stimulates other members with ways of understanding what is happening and what needs to be done.
- Share your experiences with nature in your bioregion as you become grounded in our Living Earth.
- Learn and share the New Story of the evolutionary development of the universe and our Living Earth through various means and modalities.
- Create a deliberative ecozoically-informed community with open discussions generated by members of the Pod at each gathering.

Suggested activities in Conversation Pods meetings

Here are examples of some activities that are being used in ongoing Conversation Pod meetings.

- Conversation Pod meetings may be 60 to 120 minutes long. The most common period in ongoing Pods is 90 minutes, but we have no recommended length.
- Start at the appointed time with each person's check-in. A question you might ask to begin the check-in is "What are you bringing to the meeting today (something that is on your mind or heart as you enter the meeting). Check-ins should generally be short, such as "I am grieving _____, I am celebrating _____, I am feeling _____, or I am concerned or worried about _____."
- Center the group through silence or a meditation. (Alternatively, you might begin with silence or meditation and then do the check-ins.) See what emerges from the silence or meditation that participants wish to share.
- Introduce the program for the meeting, or, if the meeting is open-ended, ask people what they wish to discuss at the meeting.
- When sharing begins, informally or formally rotate who speaks. Informally means people speak spontaneously in a "popcorn" approach to building conversational thought and expression. A facilitator may call on people who have not spoken to ensure all are included. Formally means beginning the conversation with a "round" where each person speaks "in turn" throughout the session. Participants, by stating "pass," may choose to skip their turn and perhaps speak later, in turn. A hybrid of the two is to begin with a round and then have open discussion after the round ends. Both the informal and formal ways generate their own energy, quality of participation, and mutual respect. All participants should be engaged whether they are conversing or not. Being respectful means not dominating the time speaking and also means expressing yourself fully in the moment. The speaking is designed to build energy among one another in the Pod as the emerging ecozoic is explored.

Allow silence to happen if no one speaks right away after someone has spoken. The silent, extended pause is part of the conversation due to its energetic qualities.

- Near the end of the meeting, make announcements and address other concerns of the Pod.
- Before closing do another round where people respond to the question "What was the touchstone (alternatively, the takeaway) for you from today's meeting?" The touchstone is a word or phrase. A short explanation for the touchstone may be provided. People may also be invited on how well the gathering went and what could be improved.

How learning is shared with people outside of each Conversation Pod is up to the members of a Pod to determine. Some Pods may request confidentiality.

Two sets of guidelines for conversations are provided as Appendix A and Appendix B for use as your Pod sees fit.

Support Available from the Center for Ecozoic Studies

Some Conversation Pods may choose to associate with the Center for Ecozoic Studies (CES). CES will keep a list of Pods that wish to associate with CES and will facilitate interaction among Pods.

We invite and encourage members of Pods to share their experiences with us by sending reports for potential publication by CES. The content on this website is available to Pods except where specific copyright restrictions apply. (Some of our authors have restricted circulation of their works as noted on the works.) Further, members of Pods may share resources for potential use by other Pods. Through shared insights and materials we, collectively, will gain greater clarity on various ecozoic-informed pathways for moving human-Earth, human-divine, and human-human relations forward.

Conversation Pods enable participants to think, imagine, dialogue, and enact living in mutually enhancing relationships among humans and the larger community of life. Through Conversation Pods, we may all feel supported and respected as we explore with curiosity, communicate with one another creatively, and act with patient urgency as a new era, named Ecozoic, emerges through all who participate.

If you would like to know more about forming or joining an Ecozoic Conversation Pod, please email or phone Michael Powell, CES Conversation Pods Coordinator, powell14@cox.net, +1-602-330-6371.

APPENDIX A

DIALOGUE

Conversation Techniques*

Dialogue is:

- deeply reflective listening and speaking
- speaking when truly moved
- “suspending” one’s assumptions and “noble certainties” by holding them up for examination
- speaking into the group rather than to individuals, listening in the silence for the shared flow of meaning

Listening:

- Listen empathetically, from your heart, without judgment or blame.
- Listen without the urge to argue, counter, dissuade, or fix.
- Listen with equal respect to everyone, regardless of status or roles.
- Listen for each person’s special contribution to deeper understanding.
- Listen for the sake of learning rather than to confirm your current thinking.
- Listen to the quality of your own thinking.
- Listen from the collective, from the community, from the whole.

Speaking:

- Speak from your heart, from your experience, from the moment.
- Speak when you are truly “moved” rather than to fill the silence.
- Ask questions from a place of genuine curiosity, wondering, or not knowing, rather than to make a point.
- Speak into the circle, into the whole group, into the stream of shared meaning.
- Avoid cross talk – acknowledge others by speaking about their contributions. One-on-one conversations exclude others and turn the group into spectators.

Dialogue can open us to a deeper collective inquiry into our own thinking processes and the nature of thought itself. It can also open us to our own inner wisdom as we inquire together into the heart of what matters to us.

* Compiled by Rev. Randy Williams of Mineola, Texas, based on the work of David Bohm, Peter Senge, William Isaacs, and others.

APPENDIX B

**“ACQUITS”
Conversation Techniques***

▪ **A - AGREE**

We agree to the following to promote an inclusive dialogue:

▪ **A - AFFIRM**

To affirm others and their ideas and experiences.

▪ **C - CONTRIBUTE**

To contribute to the conversation in order to move it forward.

▪ **Q - QUESTION**

To ask open-ended questions to elicit deeper understanding.

▪ **U - UNITE**

To unite or connect with others and their experiences by being considerate.

▪ **I - INCLUDE**

To include others by bringing them into the circle.

▪ **T - THANK**

To thank others and extend our gratitude to them.

▪ **S - SHARE and STOP**

To share one point, breathe, and stop.

▪ **S - SELF-REGULATE**

To self-regulate by being aware of and adapting how long we talk.

▪ **S - SET PARAMETERS**

To respectfully set—and accept—parameters to create an optimal learning environment for everyone.

* Prepared by Immogene Drummond for the Deeptime Leadership Program,
<http://www.dtnetwork.org> (2021).