

## A JOURNEY OF CREATION-CENTERED MINISTRY

*Nancy Wright*



**M**y formation in relation with Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry began with assigned reading of Teilhard at Barnard College in 1970. Reading in the lofty Columbia library of his vision of all creation, I knew that I had found an articulation of an insight that centered me. Teilhard perceived the movement toward unity of Earth and humanity in complexity and consciousness, drawn by Christ, the Soul of Earth. This vision seemed to match my feelings of wonder and joy in the beauty of the sun setting on the majestic Rocky Mountains, relished from my childhood home in Denver, Colorado.

Always enchanted by the mysteries disclosed in worship at my Colorado Congregational church (especially hearing the pastor read Psalm 139 during Holy Communion), I then felt drawn to study Jungian thought for a BA at Barnard College in World Religions and for a Master of Divinity degree at Union Theological Seminary in Psychiatry and Religion. At Union, theologian Daniel Day Williams exposed his students to process theology, which again centered me in Teilhard's thought.

Happily, in the late 1970s, I met Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim at a friend's party, and life was never the same! Immediately I was propelled to the Riverdale Center, where I sat listening and absorbing the insights of Thomas Berry and many fascinating people gathered around him. Most remarkable, perhaps, was his delight in the wonders of creation linked indissolubly with his

deep scholarship of the world's cultures and religions. He would voice deep lament at the extinction of Earth's species in an expressive manner I will never forget. These experiences inspired me to join the board of the American Teilhard Association, where I have served until the present day.

After ordination in the United Church of Christ at Riverside Church in 1973, I established the West Side Ecumenical Ministry to the Elderly, an urban ministry in New York City. In that great city, the Hudson River, Central Park, and the neighborhood's trees all spoke to me. Soon afterwards I was on a bus to New Jersey to spend a week at Genesis Farm, studying with Sr. Miriam MacGillis. I walked out into the field one day where I said to God, "I care so much about the environment." God replied, "That's good, but you need credentials."

So I studied for an MA in Environmental Conservation Education at New York University. It was during this time that Thomas Berry purchased Roderick Nash's *The Rights of Nature* for me. Decades of creation-centered ministry followed.

At Earth Ministry in the Puget Sound bioregion, I organized Green Teams in congregations and served as editor for *Earth Letter*. I traveled to India and Africa with Coordination in Development, Inc. (CODEL), a thirty-five-member ecumenical consortium that fostered sustainable development projects. I visited various water, agricultural, and forestry projects and met wonderful colleagues who dedicated their lives to sustainability. I also co-authored a book with Fr. Donald Kill, *Ecological Healing: A Christian Vision* (Orbis 1993).

In 2006, Ascension Lutheran Church in Burlington, Vermont, called me to be its pastor, where I served until 2022. The heart-stopping beauty of Lake Champlain nestled against the layered blue Adirondack mountains inspired wonder and joy each day of those sixteen years.

The congregation conducted an active ministry centered on the lake through worship, research, and art activities expressed in the "Congregational Watershed Manual." Vermont Interfaith Power and Light (VTIPL) and ECHO, Leahy Center for Lake Champlain supported publication of the manual, which VTIPL offers free for download.<sup>1</sup> The congregation's work and my study of water—including its symbolic and physical aspects—led to a DMin in Transformational Leadership from Boston University School of Theology (2018).

I was stimulated and inspired continually by studying with Helen Narayan Liebenson at the Cambridge Insight Meditation Center, through her daily drop-in calls established during COVID, and other courses. When I first heard her *metta* prayer for the well-being and health of all creatures, I felt deeply moved and at home. I also began studies with the Green Mountain Druid Order. Based in the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://vtipl.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/CongregationalWatershedManual-InterreligiousEdition-Jan2019.pdf>.

beauty of the Dreamland Sanctuary in the Green Mountains of Vermont, our senses, imagination, and ancient practices were enlisted to draw in and concentrate energy for the healing of self and planet absorbed my energy and honed commitments.

A new ministry evolved. As pastor for Creation Care for the New England Lutherans, I worked with congregations to foster creation care. I recently moved to Connecticut and became facilitator of the Fossil Fuel Finance team for Third Act Connecticut.<sup>2</sup> On July 8, 2024, I joined in nonviolent direct action against Citibank's fossil fuel financing, which led to my being arrested for the first time in my life (though perhaps not my last), along with over six hundred other elders as part of the thirteen-week Summer of Heat.<sup>3</sup> I also facilitated a meeting between the Travelers Insurance company and Stop the Money Pipeline leaders.

Through these decades I have read many books and articles on religion and ecology. I have discovered that the insights expressed in them often repeat and build on those of Thomas Berry. All these years, the friendship of Mary Evelyn and John has been unwavering and galvanizing.

Where is the church and love of nature now? How can we realize the unity of spirit and matter, the moving forward of the cosmos toward the unity that Teilhard envisioned? If all creation groans for the revelation of the children of God (Romans 8:21-22), what are we to do?



Photo by [Ashley Inguanta](#) on [Unsplash](#)

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<sup>2</sup> <https://thirdact.org/connecticut/>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://thirdact.org/nyc/2024/04/30/summer-of-heat-official-website>.

Let us invite people to be out in nature, to fall in love again with the natural world. Many churches are exploring outdoor worship, and wild churches are emerging.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, let us advocate for an end to fossil fuels, for protection of land and water, and for renewable energy, through organizations like 350.org and Third Act.

My personal journey at this time combines studies in the Goodwin Master Naturalist Program and in the Forest Therapy Training Certificate program. I will soon have completed the third and final year as a Druid in the Green Mountain Druid Order.

If my own deep interests serve as a guide, I perceive that we may now center ourselves within both deepened scientific knowledge of the wonders of creation and committed activism that protects Earth. The church, I firmly believe, can be reborn through such renewed attention to matter and spirit with inspired activism rooted in love.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wildchurchnetwork.com/>.