

# a new faith community

a community where participants continue to engage in the sacred work of being human; drawing upon an integral framework



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## A new faith community

Many, many people experience belonging within a current world religious tradition. A religious tradition which offers them a coherent Story of meaning from which they find identity, purpose and belonging. However, for a growing number of people this is no longer the case; they no longer find their place of belonging within a particular religious tradition. Even so, they long for a faith community in which they too may belong.



for those longing for a faith community

In response, is it now time for a new faith community? A community where participants find a place of shelter to explore and deepen their spirituality within an integral framework. Integral, within such a context, means both a transcending and inclusion of all that has gone before.

**Note:** Spirituality involves both intention and practice. *Intention:* to seek and discover a Story of meaning which encompasses personal wholeness,

authentic communal belonging and, in the words of James O'Dea, "reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life and humility regarding the human place in nature."<sup>ii</sup>

*Practice:* to assist in the discovery, expression, exploration, deepening and integration of such a Story of meaning within everyday living.

The following is not a 'how to' as such. Rather a collection of images and understandings which have inspired and challenged one individual<sup>iii</sup> to *give voice* to principles and practices which may ground the formation of a new faith community.

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### Founding premise

We have entered a new epoch in human history. For this is the first time in human history where the origins of the universe have been observed.<sup>iii</sup> As such, we are living in a particularly amazing time. Joanna Macy has named our historical time as The Great Turning.<sup>iv</sup> The Great Turning is characterized by the ever-expanding knowledge of the nature of being human within an unfolding Kosmos.<sup>v</sup> In turn, such knowledge shapes the responses we discover to the time honored questions we humans pose in relation to giving meaning to our living and our dying.

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"Every few hundred years in Western history there occurs a sharp transformation. Within a few short decades, society - its world view, its basic values, its social and political structures, its key institutions - rearrange itself. We are currently living through such a time."<sup>vi</sup> Peter Drucker

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Ours is not the first Turning in human history. Take for example Galileo's support, in the early 1600's, of the Copernican theory that the Earth revolved around the sun. Such a theory stood in direct contrast to the commonly held idea of the time that the Earth was the central point around which all else revolved. From such a commonly held idea, Christian doctrine was formed regarding the centrality of the human in relation to God. However, Galileo's theory contravened the commonly held idea which in turn contravened the church doctrine. Galileo's scientific research caused such an outrage that he was put under house arrest. He was imprisoned because his theory challenged the meaning making Story of the time.

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"It is lovely to have a home, habits, etc. but when that beautiful home becomes a prison, when you can't really see anything out of the windows any more, or anything beyond the establishment you have made for yourself, then it is time to walk out of the door or listen for the knock on the door."<sup>vii</sup> David Whyte

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In our historical era the knowledge of how the world came to be has cut through the understandings we had taken for granted. In turn the old Story of human identity, purpose and belonging has been broken open. In line with such an understanding Thomas Berry wrote in the 1970's that we were in-between stories of meaning.<sup>viii</sup> He wrote that the old Story of how the world came to be and our place within it had been broken open and we could no longer answer the questions of our children. Questions such as: "Where did I/we come from?" "What is my/our purpose?" "Where do I/we fit in the greater scheme of life itself?" "Where do I/we go when I/we die?" "Is there a God?" Such questions are spiritual in nature as they relate to identity, purpose and belonging; they relate to living meaningfully in our world at any given time.

With the old Story now broken open, our historical era requires of us that we repose our spiritual questions within the light of the new scientific knowledge of how the world came into being. We are now required to go back to the beginnings of how we view ourselves. Back to the beginnings in the way the poet T.S.Eliot wrote: "With the drawing of this Love and the Voice of this calling, we shall not cease from exploration

and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time."<sup>ix</sup> Therefore taking into account human history so far, we are now required to begin again and reimagine our place of belonging within an unfolding universe.

While the sciences shed light on a new understanding of the way the world came into being, it is for each of us to reflect upon such understandings and discover our place of belonging. In this regard Gus Speth, a US Advisor on climate change has stated:

"I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that."



Thomas Berry also wrote about the need for a cultural and spiritual transformation in the form of a historical mission. He wrote: "the historical mission of our time is to reinvent the human at the species level with critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time-development context, by means of story and shared dream experience."<sup>x</sup> Why does Berry call us to reinvent ourselves as a species? According to Evelyn Tucker, Berry "was motivated by his deep concern for the almost suicidal path of humans in their destruction of Earth and in their violence and indifference to one another."<sup>xi</sup>

Within the light of the need to reinvent ourselves as a species and in so doing, to discover our place of belonging within a new Story of meaning, is it time for a new faith community? Einstein wrote: "no problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." As a consequence, is it now time for a new faith community whose participants actively engage with the new consciousness emerging in this chapter of The Great Turning? Engage with the new consciousness calling

forth a new Story of meaning for the human being; a new Story centering on the ongoing transformation of the human family in the here and now.

### Why is Story so important for human beings?

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To be human is to live meaningfully through Story. Our Story involves the facts (as we observe them at any given time and place) and the interpretation given to such facts. Therefore our Story is subjective. Even so, our Story shapes our values and determines the way we will live and act in our world.

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One metaphor helpful for understanding why Story is so important to the human family is offered by John Shea. That metaphor is: "Story is the human way of seeing in the dark."<sup>xii</sup> And within such imagery what is the dark? It is the time honored questions we pose around identity, purpose and belonging.



Why do we pose such questions? Because we human beings are both driven and enabled to seek meaning for our living and our dying. We are able to pose our spiritual questions and discover responses which hold truth . . . for now. The responses to our questions are metaphorically *held* by way of a coherent Story. Within a coherent Story of meaning we become visible: visible to ourselves, visible to others and visible within the big picture of Life Itself. Also when we live within a coherent Story of meaning we experience personal wholeness and authentic communal belonging. From such an orientation we may continue to live daily life with joy and passion.

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According to Parker Palmer, wholeness "does not involve a cancellation of one side of us in favor of another."<sup>xiii</sup> Rather wholeness is experienced as the inner freedom to befriend the whole range of *colors* we find within ourselves. Colors here means our brilliance, our ordinariness and our not so desirable aspects. As we befriend our whole self we are able to "embrace all that is within us and an enthusiasm for working with it all to mine and refine its buried gold."<sup>xiv</sup>

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Our Story involves recalling and reflecting on our lived experience. Such recalling and reflecting is shaped by our current worldview or, interpretive lens. We all view and interpret our lived experience through a particular lens which is shaped by the knowledge, beliefs, norms and values of our families, community groups, cultures, religious traditions and ongoing lived experience.

Our current interpretive lens both forms and limits all that we see and hear and know. Bernard Lonergan wrote that our interpretive lens: "filters all that we see, hear and know and that what does not fit will not be seen and heard and if it is, will be viewed as irrelevant."<sup>xv</sup> In turn, such an interpretive lens both forms and limits who we know ourselves to be in our world at any given moment. And who we know ourselves to be determines how we live and act in our world. However, we are often unaware of the way the lens is operating within us. We simply go about our daily living oblivious to the potency of our interpretive lens.

Are we bound within one particular interpretive view? No, we are able break through and transcend the limitations of our current view. We are able to experience transformational shifts in our interpretive view. How may we experience such transformational shifts? Apart from ongoing life experience, Lonergan claimed that open-ended questions were at the heart of the transformational process; open-ended questions which are posed within the light of our current knowledge, beliefs and lived experience.

Does viewing life through an interpretive lens mean there is no truth as such? Are we simply living through a perspective?! Is our Story of meaning simply a fiction? And if so, why bother to take the time and effort to discover a coherent Story of meaning? Are we fooling ourselves that life has meaning by believing we can discover true identity, purpose and belonging? In response to such questions, our Story of meaning is not fiction. Our Story is truth, as truth relates to meaning making. In turn such truth shapes our values and determines the way we will live and act in our world.

Examples of the way our Story shapes the way we live and act in our world are as follows. In the old Story we humans viewed ourselves as the central character. As a result we humans sought to take dominion over the Earth and subdue it to our will. However, we now know ourselves to be part of a 13.8 billion year Story; a Story in which we are no longer the central protagonist. That position is now held by the unfolding nature of the universe. However we do belong in the Story. We belong simply because we are here.<sup>xvi</sup> And it is now for us to discover how to take up our place of belonging.



our Story is truth, as truth relates to meaning making

Summary: To be human is to live meaningfully through Story. Our Story is subjective as it includes both facts and interpretation. Even so, our Story shapes our values and determines how we will live and act in our world at any given time. We are entering a new epoch in human history where the old Story of meaning has been broken open.

We are now required to discover a new Story of meaning. A new Story needs to be congruent with our current understandings of how the world came into being/continues to be. A new Story needs to allow us to find and take up our place of belonging as individuals, as cultures, and as a species within the wider Earth community. (For more on this topic see [www.treeoflife.org.au](http://www.treeoflife.org.au)/the sacred work of being human/finding our place of belonging)

## A new faith community

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Faith: "A way of seeing depth and meaning in the ordinary." Lawrence Freeman<sup>xvii</sup>

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Faith is not a belief system. Rather as Lawrence Freeman wrote: "faith is a way of seeing depth and meaning in the ordinary." As such faith is a human capacity for discovering meaning in our living and in our dying. Although faith is not a belief system, it does draw us towards discovering a meaningful belief system. And while the capacity of faith may remain constant, meaningful belief systems will evolve over time. As mentioned earlier, there have been times throughout human history when a once meaningful belief system became redundant.

For thousands of years human belief systems have been the domain of the world religious traditions; for example Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Buddhism (the five world religions of our Time in evolutionary history). As such, religious traditions have been central to human meaning making. While this is no longer the case within western culture, Daniel Siegel wrote: "the religious/spiritual traditions have brought to light how to 'cultivate and refine' human capacities."<sup>xviii</sup> Therefore the religious traditions have had their place within the ongoing transformation of the human family by way of shaping humanity's value system.



for thousands of years human belief systems have been the domain of religions

One example of the way a religious tradition has shaped human values comes from the Christian Scriptures where it is written: "in the end three things remain, faith, hope and love and the greatest of these is love." In relation to such values, a new faith community will recontextualize the meanings within the terms faith, hope and love while retaining them as values. An example of such a recontextualization is: faith: a capacity for giving meaning to our living and dying; hope: the possibility of transformation - grounded in reality; love: an energy drawing us towards authentic relationship with Self, others, and the wider Earth community.

Religious traditions did not emerge within a vacuum. They emerged within a particular cultural Story of meaning in response to questions posed at that time. In a similar vein, a new faith community will not emerge within a vacuum. Rather it will emerge in response to the overarching question of our time and place: "what does it mean to be human in an unfolding universe?"

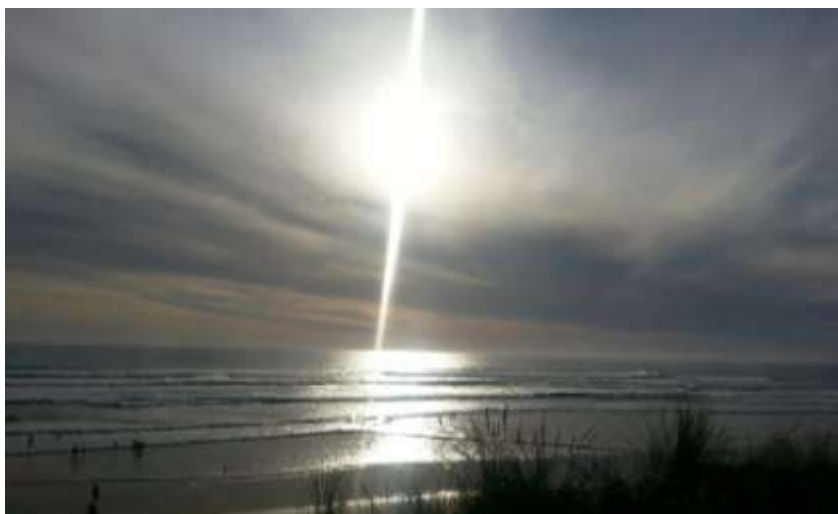
While a new faith community will break through the limitations of the current religious traditions it will also include the wisdom and knowledge which continues to resound. One continuing understanding is that of the call/response quality within the term *faith*. However, the *call* element is now understood to be initiated by the "primordial whisper"<sup>xxix</sup> of inner wisdom; in the form of the "creative action of love and grace in our hearts."<sup>xxx</sup>

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A new understanding of the term *grace*:  
the invitation to live our humanity fully in response to the energy of love acting  
by resonance within the unfolding nature of Life Itself. Kaye Twining

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The *response* element now takes form as an "ever-deepening surrender"<sup>xxxi</sup> to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts. Such an act of surrender allows us to discover our true place of belonging at this point in history. Once we discover our true place of belonging, we come home to ourselves-in-our-world.



the call/response: to come home to ourselves-in-our-world

**Note:** Surrender is one term which can give rise to strong reactions. Therefore it is important to clarify the way it is being applied within this context. Surrender simply means that within the light of lovingkindness we "stop fighting against ourselves; stop pushing against our reality at this moment in time."<sup>xxxi</sup> Also, to surrender means to let go of our attachment to a particular Story of meaning which has now become redundant. As a result of such a letting go we may be open to experience transformational shifts in our view.

In light of the understandings offered above a new faith community will, at this point in time, offer a place of shelter for individuals to repose *their* spiritual questions and discover *their* responses which hold truth . . . for now. As such a new faith community will not offer a completed Story of meaning to which members are required to give assent. Rather, a new faith community will be orientated around the poet Rilke's invitation:

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"Be patient towards all that is unresolved within your heart and try to live the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue.



Do not seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without realizing it, live along some distant day into the answer.

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Within the context of this article such a process of responding to the calling forth of a new Story of meaning with an attitude of patience and curiosity is named as the sacred work of being human. Central to such a process is an integral framework.



a new faith community

artwork by Julieanne Beckham

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### **A new faith community**

A community where participants continue to engage in the sacred work of being human; drawing upon an integral framework.

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### **Sacred**

an ever-deepening experience of connection and belonging in daily life.

### **Work of being Human**

in response to the ever-expanding knowledge of the nature of being human within an unfolding universe, we are required to participate in the ongoing transformation of the human family within the wider Earth community. Within such a context transformation takes place within three levels: the individual (intrapersonal), the cultural (interpersonal) and the human species within the big picture Story (transpersonal).

The sacred work of being human is not a new idea as such. In the 14th Century the Sufi poet Hafiz wrote the following:



if they make you become more human

### Becoming human

Once a man came to me and spoke for hours about the great visions of God he felt he was having. He asked for confirmation, saying, "are these wondrous dreams true?" I replied: "how many goats do you have?" He looked surprised and said, "I am speaking of sublime visions and you ask about goats!" And I spoke again saying, "yes brother - how many do you have?" "Well Hafiz, I have sixty-two." Again I asked, "and how many wives?" Again he looked surprised, then said, "four." Yet again I asked, "How many rose bushes in your garden?" "How many children, are your parents

still alive, do you feed the birds in winter?" And to all he answered. Then I said, "you asked me if I thought your visions were true. I would say that they were if they make you become more human, more kind to every creature and plant that you know.

### An integral framework

An ancient saying was: "dig a deep well with one shovel, rather than many shallow wells with many shovels."

A new saying is: "dig one deep well with many different shovels."<sup>xxiii</sup>

Within the context of a new faith community the one deep well is the sacred work of being human. The many shovels are the enduring knowledge and wisdom teachings attained throughout human history. Such an approach is named as integral. Put simply, integral means both a "transcending and inclusion"<sup>xxiv</sup> of all that has gone before. Furthermore, the Integral Institute of Australia wrote on the term integral: "Integral theory is an all-inclusive framework that draws on the key insights of the world's great knowledge traditions. The awareness gained from drawing on all truths and perspectives allows the integral thinker to bring new depth, clarity and compassion to every level of human endeavor - from unlocking individual potential to finding new approaches to global-scale problems."<sup>xxv</sup>

Thus, an integral framework breaks through and transcends the limitations of all previous human knowledge and belief systems and also includes that which continues to resound in our time and place in history. Such knowledge includes the sciences: including medical science, astronomy, anthropology, biology, neuroscience. Related fields also included are: psychology, philosophical discourse and the arts in general. Also included are the knowledge and wisdom teachings from past and present religious and spiritual traditions.

An integral framework is ". . . concerned with the human family as a whole. This leads one to an intuition of what might be called the tradition, the human tradition. The human tradition sees all of humanity in the evolutionary process of maturation."<sup>xxvi</sup>



an integral framework both transcends and includes

### A cautionary note

It is important to offer a cautionary note about an integral framework. Within a western individualistic, consumer society it is easy for individuals to consume religious and spiritual traditions in the same manner we consume goods. Once a tradition has metaphorically been *devoured* and the unpalatable aspects spat out, the individual moves on to devour another tradition and then another; seemingly never satisfied. Such a practice has been named as spiritual consumerism or spiritual materialism.

The Buddhist nun, Pema Chodron, cautioned against such spiritual materialism when she wrote: "Each religion or philosophical belief or New Age group has a kind of wisdom that it carries and explores. The point is it is best to stick to one boat, so to speak . . . and let it put you through your changes . . . whatever that boat may be, because otherwise the minute you begin to hurt, you'll just leave or you'll look for something else."<sup>xxvii</sup> In the same manner Pema Chodron also quoted her teacher's advice of: "Stop shopping around and settle down and go into one body of truth."<sup>xxviii</sup>

It is imperative to bear in mind Pema Chodron and her teacher's wise counsel. Nevertheless with the human tradition as the path of a new faith community, an individual may intentionally draw from an integral framework in order to deepen their engagement with the one path, rather than simply feeding an ego-centric drive towards spiritual consumerism.

Summary: As with all religious traditions, a new faith community does not arise within a vacuum; it arises in response to the call of our time to return to the beginnings and reimagine our place of belonging within a new Story. A new Story which centres upon the unfolding nature of the universe. In so doing, we will continue to participate in the ongoing transformation of the human family on the levels of the individual, the cultural, and the species within the wider Earth community. Such a process is named as the sacred work of being human; drawing upon an integral framework.

### Transformation of the human family

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"Be the change you want to see in the world." Mahatma Gandhi

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Transformation<sup>xxix</sup> is not about self-improvement, for self-improvement can be likened to a change of clothes. As Anne Hillman wrote: "transformation is not like putting on a new set of clothes . . . It is something that wounds us and calls our identity into question."<sup>xxx</sup> Such a wounding, in the words of William Lynch, is not one of "entering so deeply into us that it annihilates our resources and identity. Rather, it is love calling forth a new view."<sup>xxxi</sup>



Transformation is not a process we can control or force. We simply remain open to the invitation if and when it emerges within us. Neither is transformation a one-time event. Rather transformation is an ongoing, natural life process involving the invitation to continue to engage with the creative action of love and grace in our hearts towards compassionate Self knowledge and authentic living.

Transformation takes us on an inner journey; an inner journey undertaken alone and at our own pace. An inner journey for which there is no pre-determined path. Although we cannot see the path ahead, we can usually see where the path has led. We see the path in the rear view as we reflect on our living and recognize where shifts have taken place within us.

Transformation may occur within the life of an individual, within the life of a culture and within the life of the human family. Transformation may be experienced as incremental shifts which expand our current view of ourselves-in-our-world. Such a process may be likened to *new ways of seeing*. There are also pivotal moments when a transformational shift *breaks open* a current view; perhaps even causing a crisis of meaning. Such a breaking open requires a restructuring and reforming of our interpretative view which may be likened to *seeing with new eyes*. And when we *see with new eyes* it is as if we previously were viewing a completely different scene.

**Note:** It would seem that our anglo-western culture is experiencing a pivotal moment where we are being called to restructure and reform our view of ourselves-in-our-world. We are being called to *see with new eyes*. For example: ancient civilizations knew themselves to be undifferentiated within creation. Anne Hillman names such a *way of seeing* as "mystique participation."<sup>xxxi</sup> Then a Turning commenced which led towards an experience of individuation. Such individuation within western culture became individualism.<sup>xxxi</sup> As a result we came to view ourselves as the pinnacle of creation; set apart from the Earth community. Now another Turning is under way; a transformational shift towards interconnection and interdependence. A shift where we are beginning to know ourselves to be both unique individuals and intrinsically part of a much wider web of relationships.

Summary: Transformation is not the same as self-improvement. Rather transformational shifts break through and transcend the limitations of our current Story of meaning. As such, transformation takes us on an inner journey towards personal wholeness and authentic communal belonging. Such a process is not a one-time event, rather an ongoing, natural, life adventure. (For more on this topic see [www.treeoflife.org.au/the sacred work of being human/the art of transformative living](http://www.treeoflife.org.au/the_sacred_work_of_being_human/the_art_of_transformative_living))

## Why the need for community?

The human heart is full of longing. We long to discover who we are. The voices of longing keep our life alert and urgent. Yet if we cannot discover a shelter of belonging within our lives we could become a victim and target of our longing, pulled hither and thither, without any anchor anywhere. John O'Donohue<sup>xxxiv</sup>

If transformation leads us on a personal journey, why the need for community? Why can't we simply *do our own thing* so to speak? Firstly, as the O'Donohue quotation implies, we humans know ourselves to be communal creatures. We know that community is where we experience a shelter of belonging. Secondly, within



contemporary western society there is an information overload on seemingly competing spiritual practices and belief systems. For individuals, such an information overload may be confusing at best and overwhelming at worst. How does an individual choose their *way* within so many competing voices? The following quotation from Parker Palmer responds to such a question while revealing the type of community most appropriate for a new faith community:

"our solitary journey towards wholeness requires relationships in the form of a rare but real form of community which has no other agenda except to help people listen to their own inner wisdom and discern their own truth."<sup>xxxv</sup>

Such a form of community stands in direct contrast to the current world religious traditions which require members to adhere to a certain belief system.

### Community: a place of shelter

Elements which cultivate community as a *place of shelter* are: shared language, values, rituals and symbols.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

## Shared Language

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"a language is not just a body of vocabulary or a set of grammatical rules. A language is a flash of the human spirit. It's a vehicle through which the soul of each particular culture comes into the material world. Every language is an old-growth forest of the mind, a watershed, a thought, an ecosystem of spiritual possibilities." Wade Davis<sup>xxxvii</sup>

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In contrast to the current religious traditions where shared language revolves around a shared belief system, shared language within a new faith community will revolve around shared principles and values. For example: shared principles in the form of an integral framework; the evolution of the human family by way of meaningful Story. Shared values in the form of unity with diversity; cultivating peaceful relationships. From such a basis of shared principles and values, participants will seek to truly *hear and see each other* even as they continue to search for *their own* language of meaning.



each seeking their own language

## Shared Values

According to Cindy Wigglesworth: "a value is not simply a belief. A value is something so important to us that it orientates our thoughts and actions. A value is something that we live by."<sup>xxxviii</sup> Two values appropriate for a new faith community would be:

1. unity in diversity; 2. cultivating peaceful relationships from a value of nonviolence.

### 1. Unity with diversity

There was a song in the 1960's which expressed one way of unity. The song was entitled Melting Pot and the words in the chorus went: "What we need is a great big melting pot. Big enough to take the world and all its got. And keep it stirring for a hundred years or more. And turning out coffee colored people by the score." Such a form of unity involves sameness; each person becoming the same. Unity with diversity on the other hand, does not involve sameness. Rather, it involves acceptance of difference.

Unity with diversity is symbolized through the imagery of the holon, i.e., an entity which is *both* a whole in itself *and* part of something more. Arthur Koestler wrote of a holon this way: "a holon is an identifiable part of a system that has a unique identity, yet is made up of sub-ordinate parts and in turn is part of larger whole."

In a similar vein, Diamuid O'Murchu wrote of a holon: "a holon is a whole made of its own parts, yet itself is part of a larger whole. And each holon has two opposite tendencies: a self-assertive desire to preserve its individual autonomy and an integrative tendency to function as part of the larger whole."<sup>xix</sup>



The holon as a cultural metaphor is gaining prominence in recent times. For O'Murchu and others like Ken Wilber and Joanna Macy, the holon as a cultural metaphor is now superseding the previous metaphor of *the machine* which rose to significance in response to the industrial revolution.

The holon metaphor gives expression to an understanding of both/and, which is in direct contrast to the dualistic notion of either/or within the old Story. In response to such an understanding of both/and, the human family may live together in unity with diversity. Such unity with diversity acknowledges that we each live a unique personal Story of meaning which *sits within* a particular familial Story, which *sits within* a particular communal Story, which *sits within* a particular cultural Story, which *sits within* the wider Earth community's Story, which *sits within* the unfolding Life process that has continued for 13.8 billion years. Such a *sitting within* dynamic is named as nested holarchies<sup>xi</sup> where no one Story takes prominence.

What does the imagery of the holon and holarchies have to do with a new faith community? Such imagery grounds an understanding of how we may live together in unity with diversity in a way that breaks through the either/or boundaries of tribalism and frees us from judgment, fear and prejudice. As Anne Hillman wrote:

.....  
"If we are to embrace our differences our spiritual journey needs to show us how to hold them in a way that unifies rather than separates, a way that frees us from judgment, fear and prejudice."<sup>xi</sup>  
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## 2. A value of nonviolence

Central to a new faith community is the ongoing transformation of the human family. One transformational shift will be towards cultivating peaceful relationships with Self, others, and the wider Earth community. Such an orientation towards living in peace draws from a value of nonviolence and requires of us that we each take responsibility for the way we live and act in our world; that we each be the change we want to see. (For more on this topic see [www.treeoflife.org.au/the-sacred-work-of-being-human/cultivating-peaceful-relationships](http://www.treeoflife.org.au/the-sacred-work-of-being-human/cultivating-peaceful-relationships))

### Shared Symbols

The labyrinth could become a symbol of a new faith community. The labyrinth is an ancient symbol and spiritual practice reclaimed in our time. A labyrinth is not the same as a maze. A maze is designed as a test of logic. A labyrinth on the other hand, is one path with many twists and turns; one path that leads from the outside to the centre and then back out again.



the labyrinth: a symbol of the nature of transformation

The labyrinth path symbolizes the nature of transformation in that the one path flows in two directions; the inner and the outer. The inner direction flows toward the experience of personal wholeness and inner freedom. The outer direction flows toward the way we live and act responsibly in our world. One path . . . two directions.

By way of symbol the labyrinth encompasses four particular movements:

1. Being drawn to engage in the journey and choosing to take the first step.
2. Following the inward path of recognizing and accepting the reality of current lived experience and attending to the spiritual questions arising.
3. Reaching the centre where authentic Selfhood is met and befriended.
4. The outward journey of integrating authentic Selfhood within the outer world.

One path . . . two directions . . . an ongoing life adventure.

### Shared Rituals

A ritual draws participants together in unspoken ways. What ritual would resonate with a new faith community? Meaningful rituals would need to be created by each faith community.



## Founding principles for a new faith community

Within the light of all that has been written in this article, the founding principles of a new faith community would be:

- Engaging in the sacred work of being human by participating in the transformation of the human family in the here and now. Such transformation takes place on the levels of the individual, the cultural, and the species.
- Drawing upon an integral framework.
- Cultivating peaceful relationships through the value of nonviolence.
- Contemplative in orientation. A contemplative orientation involves:
  - an "ever-greater surrender to the creative action of love and grace in our hearts"<sup>xlii</sup> towards compassionate Self knowledge.
  - listening for the "primordial whisper"<sup>xliii</sup> of inner wisdom calling forth a new Story of meaning.
  - listening for ". . . that deep unfolding that is always happening within."<sup>xliv</sup>
  - "inner deep listening and quiet, still awareness . . . recognizing the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us."<sup>xlv</sup>
- Unity with diversity: breaking through the either/or boundaries of the old Story.
- Conversation as a spiritual practice. Because participants may hold divergent views and life experience, conversation will involve respect for and of each other and a willingness to metaphorically *see and hear each other*. In so doing, all will remain open to learn and grow through the practice of dialogical dialogue.<sup>xlvi</sup>



to truly see and hear each other

With such principles as a foundation, a new faith community will seek to nurture and sustain participants in their intention to explore and deepen their spirituality; to assist each participant to live their truth (Story of meaning). Poetic language for such a stance is:

.....  
Standing in our own ground openheartedly.<sup>xlvii</sup>  
.....

## Practices for a new faith community

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"a philosophy without practice is like reading a menu without ever tasting the food." <sup>xlviii</sup>

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It takes more than intention to engage in the sacred work of being human. It also takes more than a shift in thinking. To engage in the sacred work of being human will require practices which sustain, nurture and challenge us to remain open and receptive to transformational shifts in our view/s if and when they emerge. Helpful practices for our time and place in history are:

- **meditation:** leading us towards the unscripted resting place within.
- **compassionate self enquiry:** allowing us to recognize where we are entangled within a particular Storyline; allowing us to experience transformational shifts in our view/s.
- **gathering in community:** where there is a safe environment for Stories of meaning to be told, heard and reflected upon.

## To dream a new faith community into form

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### The Pioneering Spirit

Pioneer, driven to start afresh in new land.

Sit . . . Wait . . . Breathe . . .

Breathe in rhythm with the land itself.

Listen . . . Listen to the heartbeat, listen for the songline.

Sing . . . Sing the new song.

Pioneer, invited to live afresh in a new land.<sup>xlix</sup>

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In line with the poem above a new faith community will not seek to replicate the form of current religions/spiritual traditions. Rather, a new faith community will seek to wait . . . breathe . . . listen and remain open to that which is emerging.



remaining open to the calling forth of a new faith community

For those of us who so choose, may we continue to remain open to the calling forth of a new faith community . . .

- <sup>i</sup> James O'Dea, *Cultivating Peace: Becoming a 21st-Century Peace Ambassador*
- <sup>ii</sup> The one individual was born, raised and continues to live within an anglo-western cultural context; whose religious heritage was the western Christian tradition. This one individual is also passionate about what makes us humans tick and how we find our place of belonging in today's world.
- <sup>iii</sup> See Brian Cox *The Human Universe* and Brian Swimme *The Universe is A Green Dragon*
- <sup>iv</sup> Joanna Macy, Molly Young and Matthew Fox, *Coming Back to Life*
- <sup>v</sup> According to Ken Wilber et al: "Kosmos with a 'K' is the word the ancient Greeks used to denote a universe that includes not just the physical reality of stars, planets, and black holes (which is what 'Cosmos' usually means), but also the realms of mind, soul, society, art, Spirit - in other words, everything." *Integral Life Practice*
- <sup>vi</sup> "Peter Drucker was a writer, professor, management consultant and self-described "social ecologist" who explored the way human beings organize themselves and interact much the way an ecologist would observe and analyze the biological world." [www.druckerinstitute.com](http://www.druckerinstitute.com)
- <sup>vii</sup> David Whyte, English poet
- <sup>viii</sup> Thomas Berry, *The New Story: Comments on the Origin, Identification and Transmission of Values,* Teilhard Studies 1 (Winter 1978)
- <sup>ix</sup> T. S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*
- <sup>x</sup> Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*
- <sup>xi</sup> Evelyn Tucker, [www.thomasberry.org](http://www.thomasberry.org)
- <sup>xii</sup> John Shea, *Stories of God*
- <sup>xiii</sup> Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Towards an Undivided Life*
- <sup>xiv</sup> Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*
- <sup>xv</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*
- <sup>xvi</sup> See Brian Cox, *The Human Universe*
- <sup>xvii</sup> Lawrence Freeman, *Jesus Teacher Within*
- <sup>xviii</sup> Daniel Siegel, *The mindful Brain: Reflection and Attunement in the Cultivation of Well-being*
- <sup>xix</sup> Anne Hillman, *Awakening the Energies of Love: Discovering Fire for the Second Time*
- <sup>xx</sup> Thomas Merton, [www.thomasmertoncenter.org](http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org)
- <sup>xxi</sup> Thomas Merton, [www.thomasmertoncenter.org](http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org)
- <sup>xxii</sup> Dr. Amy Johnson, [www.dramyjohnson.com](http://www.dramyjohnson.com)
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Rory McEntee & Adam Bucko, *The New Monasticism: An Interspiritual Manifesto for Contemplative Living*
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Ken Wilber et al, *Integral Life Practice*
- <sup>xxv</sup> [www.integralinstitute.org.au](http://www.integralinstitute.org.au)
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Rory McEntee & Adam Bucko, *The New Monasticism*
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Pema Chodron, *The Wisdom of No Escape and the Path of Lovingkindness*
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Pema Chodron, *The Wisdom of No Escape*
- <sup>xxix</sup> Transformation: breaking through the limitations of our current formation, i.e., the norms, knowledge, beliefs and values we currently live by
- <sup>xxx</sup> Anne Hillman, *Awakening the Energies of Love*
- <sup>xxxi</sup> William Lynch, *Images of Hope*
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Anne Hillman, *Awakening the Energies of Love*
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Individualism: the pursuit of personal happiness and independence rather than collective goals or interests; the belief that society exists for the benefit of individual people, who must not be constrained by government interventions or made subordinate to collective interests (Encarta Dictionary)
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> John O'Donohue, *Eternal Echoes: Exploring our Hunger to Belong*
- <sup>xxxv</sup> Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> Wade Davis, *Dreams from Endangered Cultures* [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Cindy Wigglesworth, *SQ21: The Twenty-One Skills of Spiritual Intelligence - Deep Change*
- <sup>xxxix</sup> Diarmuid O'Murchu, *Quantum Theology: Spiritual Implications of the New Physics*
- <sup>xl</sup> A holarchy directly contrasts the previous notion of hierarchy, i.e. arranged in ranks of power and seniority. For within a holarchy both the individual and the wider communities are recognized equally. See Ken Wilber et al, *ILP*
- <sup>xli</sup> Anne Hillman, *Awakening the Energies of Love*
- <sup>xlii</sup> Thomas Merton, [www.thomasmertoncenter.org](http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org)
- <sup>xliii</sup> Anne Hillman, *Awakening the Energies of Love*
- <sup>xliv</sup> Rory McEntee & Adam Bucko, *The New Monasticism*
- <sup>xlv</sup> Australian Indigenous understanding of Dadirri by Aboriginal writer Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann

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<sup>xlvi</sup> Dialogical dialogue: "dialogical dialogue is a way of relating to one another, such that we allow ourselves to be changed in the light of the wisdom of the other. It is a dialogue that is always an exploration. Its philosophical roots stem from an understanding that the other is not really other, but participates in a shared reality of which we ourselves are a part. . . .The other is not the same as our self, but is not separate from our self either. Together, we both participate in a shared reality and we affect and change that reality through our interactions with one another." From *The New Monasticism*

<sup>xlvii</sup> Kaye Twining, 2015

<sup>xlviii</sup> Quoted in Anne Hillman, *Awakening the Energies of Love*

<sup>xlix</sup> Kaye Twining, 2014