A Foundation for Nurturing a Spirituality for Environmental Sustainability

Sheryl Carmody
Presentation

- Praxis emphasis rather than a theoretical exploration

- Dimensions of The Big Story: evolutionary story of Universe-Earth-Human

- My Story: personal practices

- Our Story(ies): Practices of a spiritual community group (Sundowners) and Ruah Community Services
Starting Place

- Human species needs to undergo massive behavioural and consciousness change to support and cooperate with life system of the planet Earth

- Engage key domains of human attributes:
  - mind (intelligence/will)
  - hands (endeavour/cooperation)
  - heart (emotions/connections)
  - Spirit (universal consciousness, participation in evolutionary mysterious life energy)
Starting Point cont.

- Leading-edge human pursuits are occurring in key domains - can be tapped into for inspiration, learning and participation

- Silos/schisms - reduces the potency for the desired change

- Integrity of the whole, the power of collaboration and integration, collective action and across sector networks for change
Big Story

• Cosmic-Earth-Human Evolution
  • Unique Knowledge of this Generation
  • Opportunity for Shared Creation Story
Universe/Earth Evolution

- Some 13.7 billion years ago, our Universe flashes into existence
- 4.5 billion yrs ago Sun is born
- 4.45 billion Planets are formed, Earth brings forth an atmosphere, oceans, and continents
- 4 billion – first prokaryotic cell emerges
- 3.9 billion – photosynthesis
Sun compared to all planets
Comparing Arcturus

Arcturus a bright neighbour - a relatively close star at only 36.7 light-years from Earth.
Comparing Antares

ANTARES is the $15/16$th brightest star in the sky and is more than 1000 light years away.
Now how big are you/we?
Oh My God!!!
Human Species Emergence

• 7,000,000 – earliest evidence of our ancestors
  – Lady Toumai – Chad July 2001 – Michel Brunet

• 3,700,000 – Homo Erectus – Tanzania 1976 –
  Mary Leakey (stands, refines tools, 1.3m controls fire)

• 200,000  Homo Sapiens – Ethiopia 1990s -
  Leakey & White (direct ancestors walk the savannah east-
  central Africa – all modern progeny of a small group of
  African just one woman)
Perspective: Grounded in Reality

- Modern Humans 150,000 - 200,000 years ago – in terms of the earth history of 4.5 billion years – we have appeared in the last 0.001% of time !!!
Different takes on the Big Story

• Pure physical/biological evolution perspective

• The story of evolution reveals evolutionary energy that has intrinsic good - seen as sacred story

• Religious people who accept what science offers about how we come to be here but hold belief there is an ultimate reality (God) behind evolution and within which the universe is held
Big Story and Spirituality

• Access to common knowledge – shared creation story – in a global world a unifying opportunity
• Original energy brought forth
• Continuous process
• Inter-dependency with the natural world/ ecosystems
• Shared history (ancestors) with other species – we are related thought energy and genetics – a kinship
• Invitation for a new relationship between science and religion/spirituality
✓ Earth is primary

✓ Earth is a communion of subjects not a collection of objects

✓ Nothing is itself without everything else

✓ Universe has psychic-spiritual as well as physical-material reality

✓ The story of the universe is the new sacred story

Thomas Berry
1914 - 2009
More and more of us realize that only by understanding the true nature of the universe both scientifically and spiritually can we get to see where we fit into it all, how we each affect everyone and everything around us, and how we can make a significant difference. This understanding is the key to personal responsibility for change and also, ultimately, to our lasting happiness and fulfilment.

Paul Bailey, Think of an Elephant

The environment becomes sacred, because to destroy what is essential to life is to destroy life itself.

Wangari Maathai, Replenishing the Earth: Spiritual Values for Healing Ourselves and the World
Challenge for All

The Great Work of our generation... transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when human species would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner or mutually enhancing

All human institutions, professions, programs and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship.

*Thomas Berry*
Big Story: Basic Framework for Education

- The Big Story is coming more accessible to the general public
- Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker
- Film: Journey of Universe
- Book: Journey of the Universe
My Story

- Priority areas for reflection and learning
  - alone
  - with my husband
  - within the workplace
  - membership of community spiritual group (Sundowners)
  - joining a international movement – Changing the Dream
Encounter with Land/Natural World
Water of my childhood
Rock of my Childhood
Bush of my childhood
Learning from Indigenous people: Noel Nannup
Kichwa/Quechua People

- Pachamama ... Mother Earth
- Shaman cleansing/healing ceremonies
- Community seasonal ceremonies/sites
- Biodynamic astronomic agriculture
Achuar People: Amazon Rainforest

- 6000 people in 65 communities in 1m hctrs
- Intact culture ... rainforest community
- Amazon rainforest ... Lungs of the Planet
- Pharmaceutical treasure trove
- A ‘warrior’ people seeking partnership
KEY INSIGHTS

Earth is primary, I am derivative

I am dependant on earth for totally of my life

I am connected to all

I am a species amongst species

Openness to the natural world having spirits

Earth Community is

Strong Intellectual, Spiritual, Physical and Experiential opportunities
Daily encounters and connections
Our Stories

- Work (Ruah Community Services) and Out of Work (Sundowners Community Group)

- Both span near 3 decades
Membership of Community Spiritual Group

- Meet twice a month – a home or natural setting
- Create an hour spiritual reflective/ritual space
- Topics varying from social justice theme; current societal challenge, wonders of creation, seasons, special annual date ie. Reconciliation week
- Reflection take space within the Universe/Earth story and human place and role within this
- Offer some public events
Ruah Community Services: Profile

- Original Company Daughters of Charity
- Operated in Perth since 1959
- Ruah Community Services not-for-profit public company, limited by guarantee under the Corporations Law WA
- Medium size community organisation $17 million, approx 200 staff
- Essentially in two sectors
  - Roots in homeless/housing sector
  - Largest today - mental health programs
  - Specialist services – Women’s Support Services – women leaving prison
Mission: To redress disadvantage and enhance human spirit

**Vision**: A socially just, compassionate, participative, and sustainable community

**Core Values**:
- Respect
- Grass roots
- Integrity
- Partnership
- Creativity
What ‘Inclusive Spirituality’ means for Ruah...

...acknowledging the innate spirit of each person and recognising that there are diverse paths to nurturing the human spirit
RCS Strategic Framework

- Environmental
- Aboriginal
- Participation
Environmental Sustainability Framework

- Reduce direct energy use
- Reduce impact of vehicle use
- Reuse, recycle, reduce
- Green procurement
- Incorporating sustainability into organisational life
Ruah Community Services

- Elements RCS Inclusive Spirituality
  - a relationship to the earth and natural world
  - a global social justice consciousness

- Adoption of Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium
Symposium purpose:
We invite you to explore a new global and local vision built on an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling and socially just presence on Planet Earth.
Rights of Nature

- Australian Wild Law Alliance
- Convenor Australia – Michelle Maloney
- www.wildlaw.org.au
- Presentation on Saturday 9th Feb 2013 in Perth