

# STILL POINT

A PUBLICATION OF TAU CENTER

*A spirituality ministry of the Wheaton Franciscans*



ECO-SPIRITUALITY

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# MAKING SPACE FOR ECO-SPIRITUALITY

*Eco-spirituality is more than ecology and theology.  
It calls us to reconnect.*

A spirituality closely bound to God’s creation has deep roots in Scripture, where in Genesis God separates light from darkness and water from sky, then creates all plants and creatures of Earth and sea and sees how good it is... A couple of millennia later, St Francis of Assisi added his voice to those who recognize the interconnectedness of all things - finding God in, and praising God through, all of creation, including the sun, moon and stars, wind, water fire and the Earth itself.

The prefix ‘eco’ before ‘spirituality’ comes from the Greek oikos, meaning home – a reminder that this house is the only one we have, it is our common home and we are here together.

Eco-spirituality leads us to an understanding that we are part of an interrelated, interconnected, evolving web, calling us to live in right relationship with all of creation.

*Adapted from [Barbara Fraser, National Catholic Reporter](#)*



# BEING PRESENT - INVITE NATURE INTO YOUR LIFE

**W**e often have the perception that nature is remote. It's somewhere out there in the distance, and to fully access it and benefit from it we have to leave our workaday lives behind. Wherever we are, nature surrounds us and we're a part of it.

Symphonies of birdsong play overhead as we load groceries into our car trunk. The tangy scent of earth dampened by dew fills the morning air. And even alongside highway on-ramps, flowers grow.

Biomimicry expert Jane Benyus has said when she's outside she tries to quiet her analytical mind. She listens, observes, and puts herself in the presence of nature, allowing its beauty and surprise to unfold before her.

We can do the same whether we're walking along city streets or sitting quietly in a meadow. Next time you step outside or travel deep into the wilderness, try the following mindfulness perspectives and practices to invite the wonder of nature into your life and learn a bit from its majesty. Next time you step outside, try these three simple practices to be fully present to the benefits of nature.

## 1) Open Your Senses to the Outdoors

Whenever you're outside, open up your senses. See the sky overhead, feel the ground beneath your every step, look for insects that might be hiding in narrow sidewalk cracks. Nature can be warm, wondrous, and welcoming, but also raw, gray, and punishing. When we allow nature to be just as we find it, our perspective widens, inviting delight or invigoration and helping us put our daily worries into perspective, even if only for a few moments.

## 2) Get Outside More Often

Whether we realize it or not, we spend most of our time indoors. In doing so we cut ourselves off from the wide-ranging benefits of being in nature, which include everything from lessening depression to boosting our immune systems.

As we begin our day, we can become more mindful about the indoor/outdoor balance we're striking. And if we've had a roof over our head for too long, we can plan a walk, a day at the beach, or a hike in the woods.

## 3) Marvel at Nature's Genius

Awe is a powerfully uplifting emotion and most everything in nature is awesome—whether it's a raspberry-sherbet-colored sunset or the elegantly repeating spirals found in the bright-yellow center of a daisy. We can invite more awe into our daily lives by marveling at nature's genius.

Next time you're outdoors, take a few moments to bring your full, patient attention to an aspect of the natural world. It can be something as small as a blade of grass or as all-encompassing as a mountain vista, as mild as a mud puddle or as fearsome as a lightning storm. By more closely observing the natural world, we can discover the splendor we often take for granted but that always surrounds us.

*Excerpt from -  
[How to Invite Nature Into Your Life by Kelly Barron](#)*



# BEAUTY, REVERENCE NATURE, CONNECTION

**ECO-SPIRITUALITY** brings together religion and environmental activism. It represents the spiritual connection between human beings and the environment, in response to the ecological crisis through embodied awareness and a relational view of person to planet, inner to outer and soul to soil. The essence of eco-spirituality is tending, dwelling, reverence and connectedness.

— *Sage Journal*

**SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY** is a spiritual response to our present ecological crisis. It is a developing field that joins ecology and environmentalism with the awareness of the sacred within creation. It calls for responses to environmental issues that include spiritual awareness and/or practice. The principles of spiritual ecology are simple: In order to resolve such environmental issues as depletion of species, global warming, and over-consumption, humanity must examine and reassess our underlying attitudes

and beliefs about the earth and our spiritual as well as physical responsibilities toward the planet. Thus, ecological renewal and sustainability necessarily depends upon spiritual awareness and an attitude of responsibility.

Central to Spiritual Ecology is an understanding of the interdependence and living unity of the ecosystem. Real sustainability refers to the sustainability of the whole ecosystem rather than our energy-intensive, consumer-driven culture. This will require a re-evaluation of the central

aspects of our materialistic culture as we move towards a way of life that is in harmony with the earth as a living whole, a culture that cares for the soul as well as the soil. Spiritual Ecology is not based on any single religion or spiritual path, rather the primary recognition of the sacred nature of all of creation.

— *Emergence Magazine*

**INTEGRAL ECOLOGY** offers us a spiritual conversion built on a 'culture of encounter' as humanity faces a complex crisis that manifests in different way. It underlines how relationships

should be based on an attitude of caring for ones common home; ones brothers and sisters; and one's relationship with God, the creator. 'A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings.'

Integral Ecology challenges us to broaden our focus of concern and daily behavior... through contact with nature... highlighting the interconnectedness that exists among God, humanity and all of creation.

— *Catholic Reporter*







## ECOLOGICAL SPIRITUALITY

The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribution to make to the renewal of humanity.

Here, I would like to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living.

— *Laudato Si'* [216]



# ECO-SPIRITUALITY IN DAILY LIFE

People relate to the environment in various ways. In years past, humans viewed the environment as the ultimate source of life, a necessary factor in their continued existence on earth. Reverence for the environment and its fruits was common and ties to the earth were strong. Those human relationships with the environment, however, deteriorated. People continued to use the environment but many simply ignored their responsibility for it.

The devastating effects of human life on the environment become more apparent every day. More people are beginning to notice the need to repair the damage humans have inflicted. They express a concern for the

earth's well being in different ways: donating money to an environmental fund, reading articles on the green movement or, perhaps, arguing for the benefits of hybrid vehicles. For some, it remains a mere concern while others make a deeper commitment by integrating care for the earth into their daily lives.

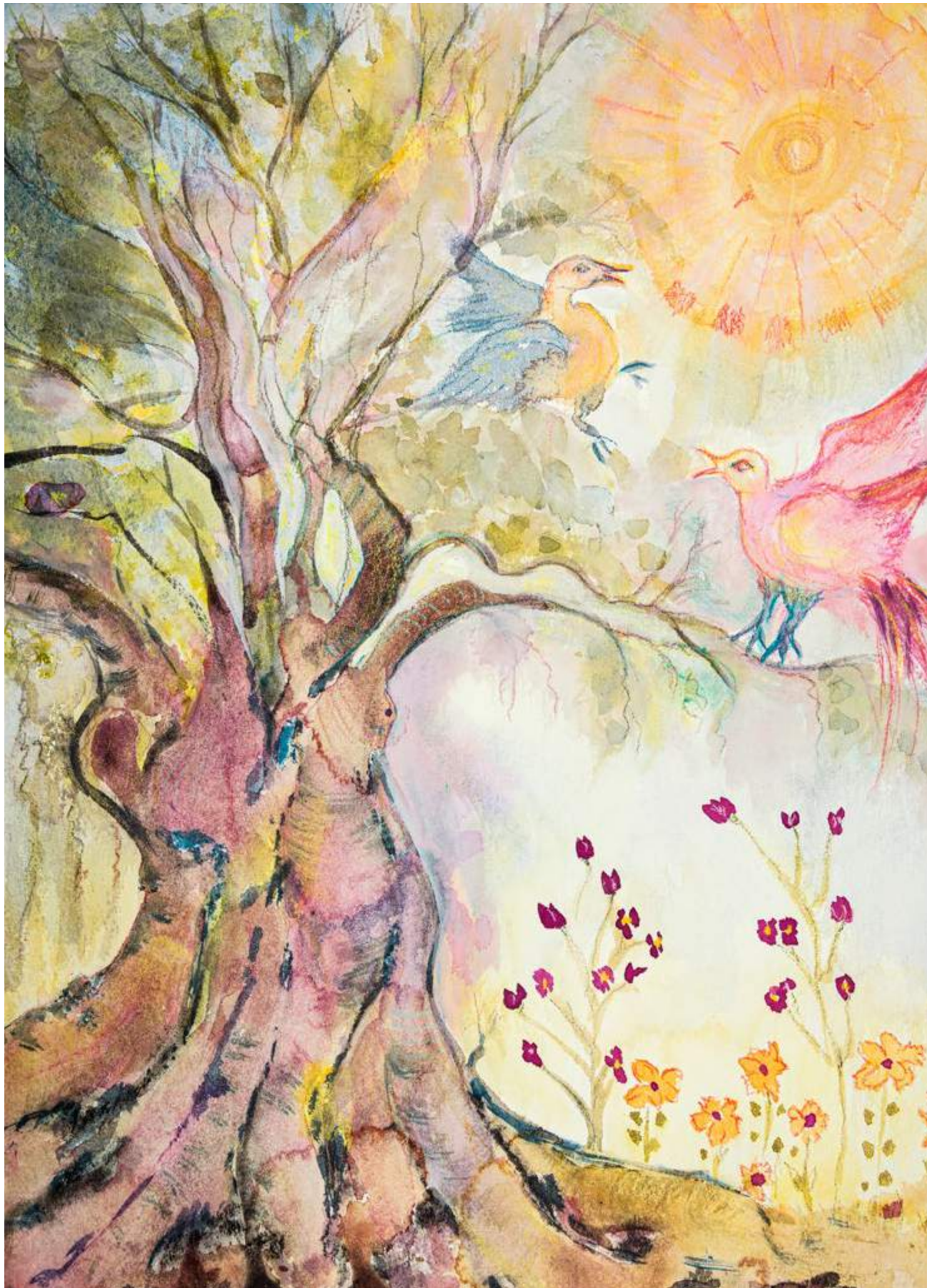
This integration is called eco-spirituality. Found in all spiritual traditions across the globe, including Native American, Judaic, Islamic, Taoist and Christian, eco-spirituality stems from the belief that the divine is present in all creation and that humans must remain acutely aware of the web of interconnections among all that exist. A sense of responsibility for the well-being of the environment

**"Ecology and spirituality are fundamentally connected,  
because deep ecological awareness, ultimately,  
is spiritual awareness."**

**— Fritjof Capra**







is embedded within the tenets of a follower's daily life, creating a deep commitment to the earth and its state of being. Followers of eco-spirituality let go of their private ego in favor of a self that is connected to the whole of the universe, becoming a part of a larger, deeper community made of humans, animals, plants and the earth.

These tenets may seem more aligned with some religious practices than others, yet eco-spirituality has manifested itself in the hearts and minds of countless individuals of diverse religious beliefs: from the native and shamanic traditions of animal and plant spirits to the Buddhist belief that all creatures on earth are one to a Christian practice of caring for the earth.

Benedictines, as Christian monastics, have long understood the need for humans to care

for the earth. Emerging in the 6th century, the Benedictines believed that intellectual and spiritual activity was associated with physical work, particularly work related to the land. They placed an emphasis on cultivating the soil and learning about it. That focus yielded a custodial relationship of the human community with the land. To this day, working and protecting the surrounding environment remains a core element of Benedictine spirituality.

Humanity and nature flourish based on a delicate balance. When humans care for the environment, nature reciprocates by supporting people physically and spiritually. The earth is calling out for help. How will you answer that call?

*Excerpt from - [Eco-Spirituality: Healing Earth, Healing Souls](#) by Holy Wisdom Monastery*

**“Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united with  
every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.”**

**— *Laudato Si'* [246]**



# INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

Integral ecology is a key concept in chapter four of *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment. It flows from his understanding that “everything is closely related” and that “today’s problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis.”

Relationships take place at the atomic and molecular level, between plants and animals, and among species in ecological networks and systems. For example, he points out, “We need only recall how ecosystems interact in dispersing carbon dioxide, purifying water, controlling illnesses and epidemics, forming soil, breaking down waste, and in many other ways which we overlook or simply do not know about.”

Nor can the “environment” be considered in isolation. “Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live,” writes the pope. “We are part of nature.”

As a result, if we want to know “why a given area is polluted,” we must study “the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, and the ways it grasps reality.” And in considering solutions to the environmental crisis, we must “seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems.”

*Excerpt from - [Integral Ecology: Everything is Connected](#)  
by Thomas Reese*

**Integral Ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator...”**

*— Laudato Si' [225]*





# CREATIVE ECOLOGY

At times, life can seem like a perfectly tuned clock, with every gear rotating in its way, yet still in perfect harmony with others. Well, the human ecosocial systems theory holds a similar view of our everyday social environment. But what are the ecosocial systems exactly, and how do they relate to creativity and ecology?

## HUMAN ECOSOCIAL SYSTEMS

According to this theory, interactions, and relationships among people, surroundings, and resources make for complex adaptive systems termed ecosocial systems, which give meaning to our lives.

On a macro level, the primary interest of human ecosocial systems is to produce, and develop, and share knowledge to ensure continuous improvement and development. On a micro level, every person has an environment; the person gives shape to their environment and vice versa.

Now from an environmental viewpoint, this interaction between an individual and their environment is the focal point of the ecosystem. In other words, we develop, learn, and achieve every day by interacting with and perceiving our environment.

Moreover, when the notion of ecology is applied to personal achievement, development, and learning, this theory sees every person's purpose, goals, ambitions, needs, and their physical and social relations with their environment, as interdependent and inseparable.

Thus, human ecosocial systems theory represents a holistic view of life in which moments connect into achievements and experiences that are meaningful to us.

## ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF CREATIVITY

It suggested that necessity motivates innovation and creativity, but in the context of personal creativity, the motivation is different. We pursue and conceptualize ideas solely to use our intellect and that of our imagination. Creativity, then, has both personal and social value.

The personal reinforcement stems from our sense of achievement, while the social is rooted in our feeling like we're contributing to something greater, and more significant than ourselves.

Our ideas and beliefs are a significant part of our ecosystems. And much like our achievements and experiences, they too have their ecology. As we go through life, we come across ideas and connect them with beliefs and ideas we've already procured, and sometimes, we generate ideas that are entirely new to us but not necessarily to the world.





Therefore, the ecological concept sees creativity as being a product of various circumstances and conditions in our life.

### THE INFLUENCE OF SPATIAL CONTEXT ON CREATIVITY

Moreover, it is suggested that creativity is a complex product of an individual's behavior in a certain situation. The situation is determined and affected by social and contextual influences, which can either inhibit or facilitate creative actions.

Similarly, every person is affected by different pre-existing conditions that preface the creative act. And while creativity presumes the creation of something new, every person draws on their already existing values, qualities, and abilities when expressing themselves creatively.

In this sense, the creative ecology primarily emphasizes the significance of spatial context; that is, environments and places, in personal creativity. This is apparent in the way creative individuals gravitate toward environments that expedite and support their creativity.

Moreover, they can identify creative potential in their environment, and adjust it to create a new one in which they, and others, can realize their creativity.

Therefore, ecology of creativity is an abstract concept that sees creativity, as well as our other actions, experiences, and achievements, as an amalgam of all situational and environmental effects - a product of continuous interaction between an individual and their environment.

*Excerpt from -  
Sintellyapp/sintelly.com  
“The Concept of Creative Ecology”*

**"You can hear the footsteps of God  
when silence reigns in the mind."**

**— Sri Sathya Sai Baba**





# SPIRITUAL ECOLOGY - PRESENCE WITH OTHERS

**H**olding space is a conscious act of being present, open, allowing, and protective of what another needs in each moment. The term has been growing in popularity among caregivers, healers, yogis, and spiritual seekers. It's a broadly used phrase to define the act of "being there" for another. The effects of this practice, however, go much deeper than simply offering support.

Consider the individual words for a moment. To hold means to embrace or encircle someone or something in your grasp. Physically, this might take the form of a hug or the cradling of a hand in yours. But you can also embrace someone non-physically with your intention, attention, and energy.

Space refers to the immediate environment you are sharing with another. This, too, may be the physical space of a room,

but more frequently refers to the mental and emotional environment you are in with others. Put together, these words embody the principle of *surrounding the environment with your awareness in way that provides comfort and compassion for all*.

Holding space involves several specific qualities of consciously relating to others, the sum of which are greater than the individual parts. Let us explore these attributes and see how they can deepen your ability to hold space for others.



## **SAFETY**

A key component to holding space is the quality of safety. For others to be open, genuine, and oftentimes vulnerable, they must feel secure and have a sense of trust. People won't let down their defenses until they know it is safe to do so.

## **SUSPENDED SELF-IMPORTANCE**

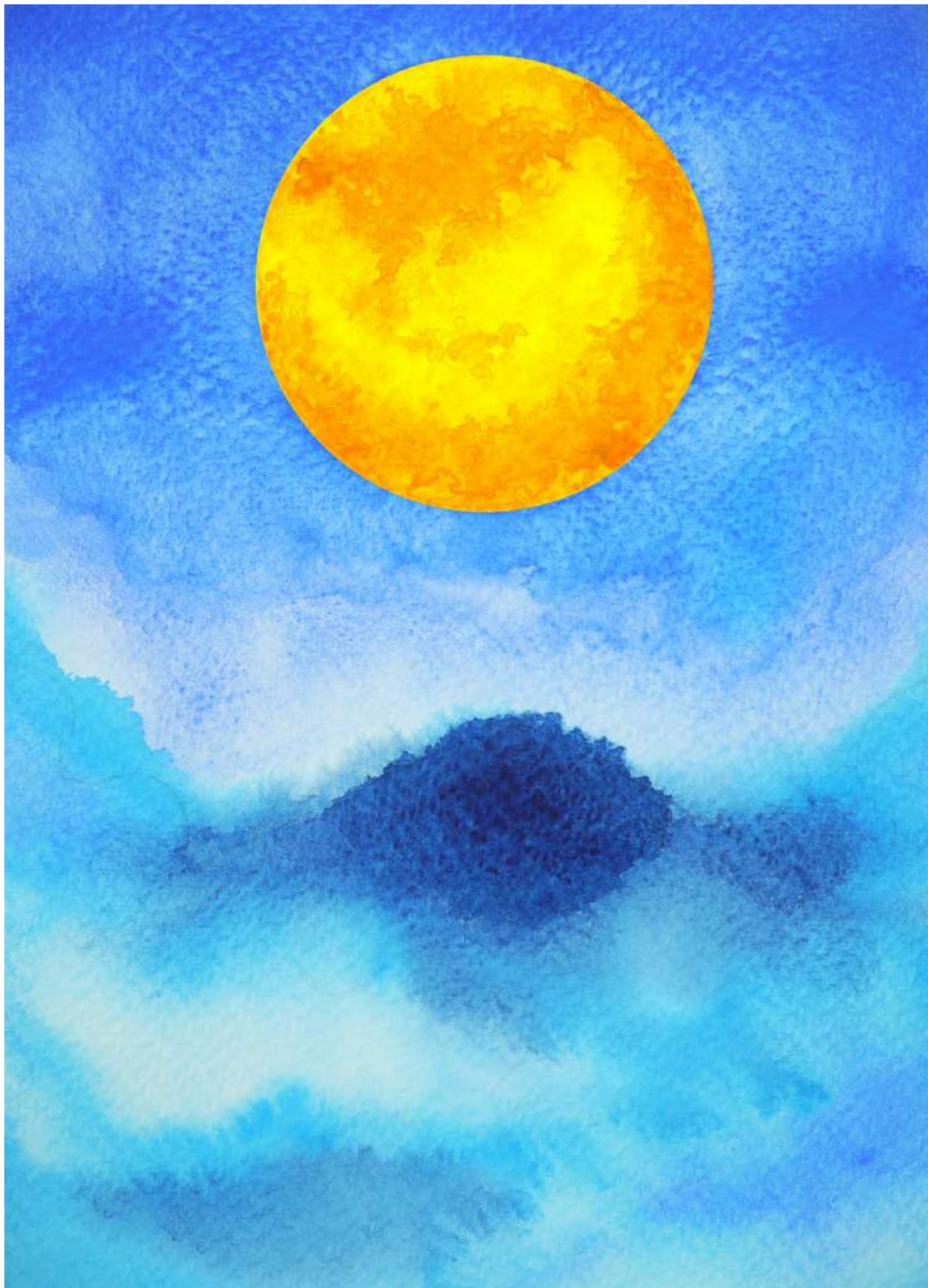
A vitally important aspect of holding space is the understanding that it's not about you. When you hold space you must make the conscious

decision to leave your ego at the door. Holding space is about serving others and your personal concerns or needs are not part of the process.

## **ATTENTION**

One of the most precious gifts you can give another is the gift of your full and complete attention. However, listening attentively without the need to respond, interrupt, or comment is a skill that takes considerable practice to master.





### **PRACTICE ACCEPTANCE**

Holding space is all about allowing — allowing this person or group to feel what they feel. Allowing them to say what they need to say. Allowing yourself to be whatever they need you to be right now. Holding space, therefore, isn't about controlling anything. Your role is that of a guardian of the space. Like two cupped hands filled with water, you are there to hold the other with your awareness. In doing so, you must allow that experience to take whatever shape it will.

### **NONJUDGEMENT**

Holding space is an impartial process. You're not there to pass judgement or to evaluate another. When you judge another's experience you create additional mental static that will only get in the way and obscure the truth. In the moment when you're holding another's fears, suffering, or grief, your opinions are irrelevant.

### **COMPASSION**

Although you nonjudgmentally practice acceptance with your full attention, that doesn't mean you wouldn't prefer things to be better. Compassion is an essential quality for the practice of holding space. To embrace another in acceptance is an act of compassion in and of itself.

In your openness to the pain of others you are essentially saying, "How can I help you? I don't want you to hurt. What can I do to help support your highest good?" Even if not spoken aloud, these intentions to relieve the suffering of others are the essence of compassion.

### **WITNESSING**

Witnessing allows you to play a special part while holding space—that of the observer. Like in quantum physics, the observer is what triggers the collapse of the wave of potential into a particle, the non-local into the localized phenomenon. But this doesn't involve any action on the observer's part. In holding space you're just there as the witness, almost like a fly on the wall. Naturally, you can participate if requested to do so, but essentially your role is that of the watcher.

Through the practice of holding space, you serve as a container for which the healing and transformation can take place. It's a powerful gift of presence that you can give to others through the quality of your attention.

*Excerpt from -  
[Holding Space: The Art of Being Present with Others by Adam Brady](#)*



# RECONNECTING WITH EARTH

Many of us are grieving the loss of the Earth's ecosystems, the changing of the climate, and the overall state of our planet and the political and cultural systems which have harmed it. We can feel especially concerned and to some degree powerless, as we are systemic thinkers who can see the longer-term implications of present-day choices, but we don't necessarily inhabit positions of power in which we could make different choices for the collective.

As a way to explore avenues we can come out of the state of powerlessness through embodied reconnection with the Earth and through building awareness of the various avenues of change-making. Below are some meditations which encourage the kind of reflection, attention and cultivation required to reconnect ourselves with the Earth and to open our minds to new options for action.

## (RE)CONNECTING WITH THE EARTH

The focus of this first meditation is to (re)connect with the Earth as a dear friend, a loved one who is part of our lives. Representing our planet as an "it", an object (or a complex collection of objects) "out there" makes it hard to connect from our hearts and emotionally feel our very real bond with it. Earth gives us resources to exist and demands that we strive to be our best selves, in order to maintain a friendship with us. Our relationship with Earth is a generative friendship between living beings, and it is this feelings awareness we want to cultivate together today.

In this meditation, we invite you into a dialog with the Earth. Maybe it's a wordless dialog: you go out into your garden and reconnect with the ground and simply stay present with your friend in silence. Maybe it's an active conversation, where you tell the Earth about you and what you're experiencing now, and listen to what it has to tell you about itself and what it's experiencing now.



Ask yourself, how would you choose to spend time with a friend? And how would you choose to spend time with a friend who is in a state of personal crisis? What would you tell that friend? Further meditations and resources can be found at [intergifted.com/meditations-earth](https://intergifted.com/meditations-earth).

## AWAKENING TO ACTION

The Climate Emergency is a crisis so vast that it's hard to grasp, both emotionally and cognitively, and easy to let ourselves be carried by the inertia of our lives as they are, even when we're aware that change needs to happen. Navigating it requires every single one of us to respond, to stop "business as usual" and rise up to the challenges in front of us. For this meditation, we invite you to prepare to take the next most effective step you are able to, in order to be part of the solution.

**AWAKENING:** This stage is about internally facing the truth of the Climate Emergency, and facing the feelings and experiences that come with it, as well as its impact in our outer lives.

**TALKING ABOUT IT:** This stage includes breaking the taboo and opening up the conversation with others (family, friends, co-workers and others in our social circles), so that we are "awake together". Talking about it with others includes talking about our feelings and internal experiences of the Climate Emergency as well as discussing action-steps.

**TAKING ACTION:** This stage includes finding effective action steps personal lifestyle changes as well as collective level political action and advocacy. From there, we let this awareness guide us to intuitively ascertain what our next personal steps are to (getting ready to) make our contribution. Further meditations and resources can be found at [intergifted.com/meditations-earth](https://intergifted.com/meditations-earth).



# GARDENS AT TAU CENTER

**T**he **ST CLARE GARDEN** will provide a place of stillness and serenity that compliments the Peace Path walking trail and the Cosmic Walk currently located on the grounds of the Wheaton Franciscans.

Amenities will include a large, shaded patio area for outdoor offerings with an adjacent lawn area for yoga and drumming. Secluded seating areas will provide space for journaling and quiet conversation in a tranquil nature setting that includes a water feature and artwork in honor of St Clare.

Adjacent to Our Lady of Angels Motherhouse, the **ST CLARE GARDEN** will be a place of gathering and contemplation.

Enjoy a peaceful walk on our campus along the **PEACE PATH** – a winding path through a beautiful prairie of several acres planted with native Illinois grasses and small woodlands. This is a beautiful space for a walking meditation, allowing for both spiritual reflection and physical exercise.

Along the path, you will find many spaces to sit in prayer or contemplation including benches, seats carved from natural elements, or small grassy areas to spread out a blanket. In addition to the Divine natural world around you, along the way you can enjoy sculptures, statues and other points of reflection. Stop at one of the Prayer Bells along the path, where you can take a moment of intention and ring the bell. As the sound of the bell echoes forth – so do your prayers reverberate and your intentions are felt for the world.

The **COSMIC WALK** is located on the Wheaton Franciscan campus surrounding the new butterfly garden. The paved path includes 25 posts with images of the watercolor prints, Significant Moments of the Unfolding of the Universe by Sr. Corlita Bonnarens, RSM.

## The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.

I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

— Wendell Berry

**"The care of the Earth is our most ancient  
and most worthy, and after all our most  
pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it  
and to foster its renewal is our only hope."**

— Wendell Berry



# ABOUT TAU CENTER

Established in 2008 by the Wheaton Franciscans, who live intentionally as a presence of blessing in our world, the Tau Center is committed to the transformation of our world by helping individuals awaken to the sacredness of life.

In the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi, Tau Center provides a peaceful and reflective environment for people seeking a deeper relationship with God, self, others and all of Creation.

Through the integration of body, mind and spirit, Tau Center is committed to offering diverse experiences where individuals can nourish their spirit, find companions on their journey, and connect what they discover to meaning in their life and the world around them.

We offer a sacred space to assist individuals on their own spiritual journey – whether it is to reconnect with their inner-spirit or whether they are seeking a deeper relationship with God and the world around them. Our programs encourage an awakening of the spirit that leads to hope, healing, peace and transformation.

Learn more about  
the Tau Center and upcoming  
programs and resources at:  
[www.taucenter.org](http://www.taucenter.org)

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## ECO-SPIRITUALITY

- Grounding Energies: Renewing Yourself Through Nature
- Nature Journaling: A Walk with Francis and Clare
- Nature Mandalas: Hearing our Franciscan Heart
- Spirit of Place: A Morning Reflection in Nature
- St Francis and Exploring God Through Nature
- St Francis: Life and Charism

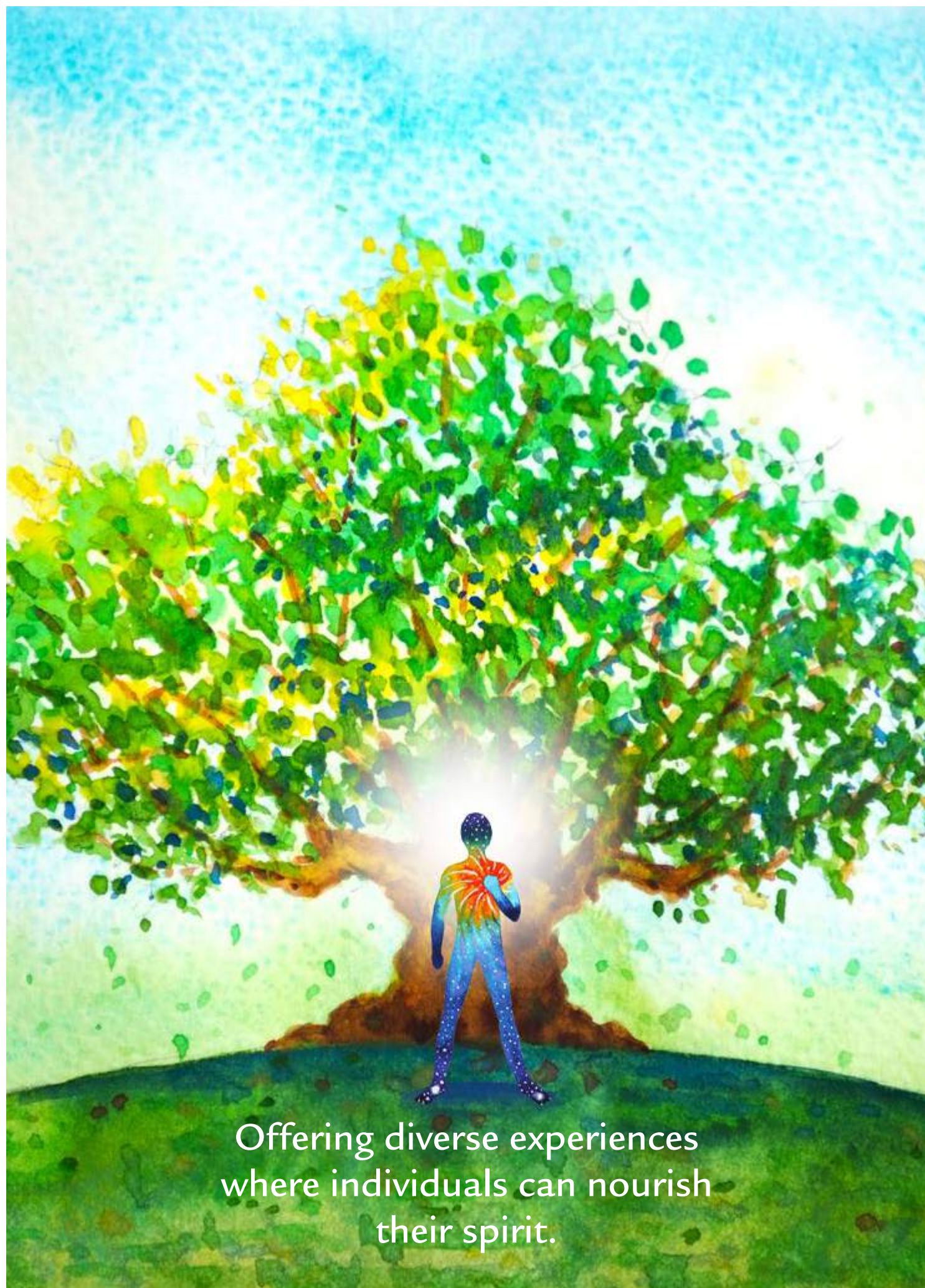
## FRANCISCAN

- Exploring the Franciscan Way of Life
- Faith Encounters the Ecological Crisis
- Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home
- Lenten Retreat: The Heart of Franciscan Wisdom
- The Revolution of Tenderness in the Way of Francis and Clare

## NATURED-BASED AND VISIO DIVINA

- Nature Journaling: A Walk on the Peace Path
- Nature Mandalas: Still Your Heart
- Visual Journaling Nature Retreat
- What Is Ours to Do:
  - Exploring Social Justice Through Lectio and Visio Divina
- Visio Divina: Custom Theme





# Gardens at Tau Center

Enjoy a peaceful walk on our campus along the Peace Path – a winding path through a beautiful prairie with a **Cosmic Walk & Butterfly Garden**, **Contemplative Bell Garden** and **St Clare Garden** on several acres planted with native Illinois grasses and small woodlands.

This is a beautiful space for a walking meditation, allowing for both spiritual reflection and physical exercise.







*A spirituality ministry of the  
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[www.taucenter.org](http://www.taucenter.org)

**"Ecological spirituality is the  
compassion that arises naturally within  
consciousness when we feel our biological  
unity with people, animals, plants and  
the elements of the Earth."**

*— David Crow*