

Group Study Guide for Thomas Berry's *The Great Work*

In order to enable groups to discuss and comprehend the magnitude of changes required as Planet Earth enters the 21st Century a 6-session study guide to Thomas Berry's book *The Great Work – Our Way into the Future* is now available. In his book, Thomas describes, in detail, the complex forces that have brought human civilization into the unique position of actively participating in shaping the entire future of the Planet on which it lives. Civilization's current situation is filled with immense opportunities, fraught with unforeseen dangers and requires an in-depth reconsideration of the values, understandings and assumptions that have carried the human species up to this point. By outlining types of changes required by the major institutions that shape human society, Thomas Berry provides the seeds for individuals and groups to chart their personal and collective ways into the ever-emerging future.

The Study Guide focuses on six primary themes of *The Great Work*. Groups study one theme per session.

1. Our Contemporary Task – undertaking a Great Work,
2. The Historical Background – participating in an emergent Universe,
3. A New Way of Knowing – rethinking the context for future actions,
4. How To Decide – building a sustainable future,
5. End of an Era – getting beyond The Petroleum Interval, and
6. The Species-Level Change – embodying the changes that will lay the foundation for future generations.

The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human – at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life-systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story and shared dream experience.

Thomas Berry,
The Great Work

Each of the six sessions covers several chapters of Thomas Berry's book. Some passages of *The Great Work* contain profound philosophical insights, others flow more like a lyric poem, still others provide detailed historical background and some motivate a person to action. In excerpting the four-page passages for each session, the editors have attempted to include some of each of these basic elements. While anyone participating in this study is definitely encouraged to read the entire book to more fully grasp the breadth of Thomas' thinking, participants can participate in lively discussions by reading only the excerpts in preparation for each session.

The Study Guide for *The Great Work* was prepared by F. Nelson Stover and Elaine K. Stover. It has been utilized by several congregations in North Carolina. The detailed lesson plans for each 1-hour session utilize the *Imaginal Education* methods developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs. For information about how to obtain the study guide contact F. Nelson Stover – StoverN@Bellsouth.net.