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Green Sisters: Bringing Spirituality and Environmental Awareness Together at Homecoming Farm

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Broadcast Journalism and Religion

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Abstract

“Green Sisters: Bringing Spirituality and Environmental Awareness together at Homecoming Farm,” addresses the topic of the “green sisters” movement and its presence at Homecoming Farm, a Community-Supported Agriculture project located in Amityville, New York. The green sisters movement, started in the 1980s in Caldwell, New Jersey, entails groups of Catholic nuns who are beginning to pursue “Earth ministries,” and dedicating their lives to environmental education and practicing sustainability. One example of this is found at Homecoming Farm, where the Sisters of Saint Dominic in Amityville created an organic farm in 1992 to nurture the surrounding community in body and spirit. This project describes the movement, while also highlighting the unique religious and spiritual benefits that come as a result of Homecoming’s works and mission.

The story of the green sisters and Homecoming Farm is told through a five-part news series. Part one describes the foundation of Homecoming and its relation to the green sisters movement. In part two, the organic practices and farming methods are explained, in addition to a description of the spiritual value of the farm. Part three expands on part two, discussing the various outreach programs the farm either started or helps. Part four is the discussion of spiritual benefits from the farm, where people from various religious backgrounds describe how they all find some religious benefit from working at the farm. Finally, part five approaches some of the critiques of the green sisters movement, and explains how Homecoming Farm is working to combat those remarks.

The medium for the project is broadcast news video, in order to convey the story in a way that would be interesting to all different types of viewers. The video was shot and the interviews conducted over a period of six visits to Homecoming Farm in the summer and fall of 2012. The project includes interviews with eleven different founders, organizers, and members of Homecoming Farm. Everything was shot, written, edited and produced by Marisa DeCandido, and is displayed at the website www.homecomingfarmcapstone.com.

Creative Project Reflective Essay

In the world of broadcast journalism, one of the most important factors to consider when creating a news package is the viewer. Primarily, the topic should be of interest to the viewer, whether it be because it affects their life and well-being, or is something relatable and interesting. Secondly, the writing, video, and editing should be clear and easy to follow, while also creative. Finally, the reporter must be a good storyteller, weaving the facts and creativity together to create an appealing product that a viewer will want to watch. While approaching my Honors Capstone, it was important for me to remember these key elements to not only tell the story of my topic, the Green Sisters movement and Homecoming Farm, but also to make it exciting for the everyday person to watch. It was these factors that motivated me to choose the topic that I did, and to make the creative decisions I made while writing, editing and producing my five-part news series for my Capstone project.

As a Broadcast Journalism major and Religion minor, I wanted to choose a story that would allow me explore what I had learned about various religious backgrounds while also utilizing my journalism skills. I knew there were a multitude of topics I could choose from that would be both interesting and controversial, such as the cover-up of many pedophiliac Catholic priests in the Philadelphia area or the misunderstanding of the Sikh religion as evidenced through a shooting last summer. However, my main interest in religion is the observation and study of areas where people of various religious backgrounds coexist and partake in spiritual activities, while still maintaining their own beliefs.

In the past, I have studied interfaith groups in Syracuse and Philadelphia, and found their various programs that support religious tolerance and understanding fascinating. Therefore, I wanted to create a project that would highlight an interfaith program that manages to create a “religious” environment in an area that is not innately “religious.”

Therefore, my project explores, in five parts, the Green Sisters movement through the lens of Homecoming Farm, a Community-Supported Agriculture project located on Long Island. The movement, which started in the early 1980s with the Sisters of Saint Dominic in Caldwell, New Jersey, focuses on educating both religious sisters and their surrounding communities on the significance of respecting and caring for the Earth. In addition, Homecoming Farm has a unique spiritual value that members say is fostered by working with nature and practicing organic farming. In order to completely explore both the movement and Homecoming Farm specifically, I created five distinct news packages that addressed topics ranging from the farm’s founding, to its outreach programs, to its spiritual values. While I knew this topic would be interesting to me, it was necessary for me to take specific creative approaches to make sure it was also interesting to the viewer. This viewer is the average television news watcher, so males and females age 50 and older.

My first approach was to develop an appreciation and understanding of Homecoming Farm, its mission, and its works before I delved into shooting video and writing my pieces. Thus, I decided to use my first several trips to the farm as simply informal interviewing and observation days. For a typical news package,

reporters have only a day to find a story, research, conduct interviews, and produce the product, which can result in a certain lack of depth in the reporting. However, because I had a lot of time to and opportunity to create this five-part news series, I was able to fully engage myself with the topic. This period of observation was arguably the most beneficial factor in putting together my final project because it allowed me completely shape and determine where I wanted my project to go before I wasted time and energy shooting and editing video I may not need. During this time, I talked for several hours with the Executive Director of Homecoming, Elizabeth Keihm, and one of the founders, Sister Jeanne Clark, to learn about its creation, development, and practices. After doing this three times, I began to craft my creative approach to shooting and writing the five parts. I determined that part one would cover the beginning of Homecoming, as well as its foundation in *The Universe Story*, a book that attempts to reconcile theological views of creation with scientific views. From there, part two would describe the organic practices of Homecoming and introduce the concept of spirituality when working in nature. In part three, I would expand upon part two and describe the various outreach programs that Homecoming's organizers either started or participates in. Part four would then address the most important topic of the series: the people of various religions (or no religion) that are members of Homecoming, and the spiritual value they find in being in an environmental situation with people of different backgrounds. Finally, part five would address Homecoming's partnership with the Interfaith Nutrition Network, a soup kitchen that feeds the hungry and homeless on Long Island. This part would discuss the

fact that even though an “Earth ministry” is unconventional for religious sisters, it can still relate to traditional ministries such as serving the poor.

I decided to organize the project in this order because I wanted it to follow a relatively chronological timeline, while also varying topics to maintain viewer interest. It was logical to begin the series with a description of the background of Homecoming Farm and how the movement began. However, from there, I considered several different options for the order of the next four parts.

Originally, I thought having the package about the different religions could go second, but realized that the viewer needed more background information about the farms various organic practices and members before I introduced the most important package. Thus, I chose to make parts two and three descriptions of how Homecoming Farm currently works and introduce some of their unique outreach programs, respectively. After I determined that the first three parts offered a proper foundation for the topic, I approached the religious aspect of Homecoming Farm in part four.

The first four parts, for the most part, provided a positive look into Homecoming Farm and the green sisters movement. However, as a journalist, it is necessary to look at a story from *all* sides. Although my personal opinion is that I agree with Homecoming Farm’s work and mission, a reporter cannot let their subjectivity dictate a story. To turn my series from “feature” story to “news” story, I had to look at Homecoming through the lens of a critic. Thus, in the fifth and final part of the series, I focused on two main critiques of the green sisters movement and Homecoming’s responses. This gave legitimacy to my story as not

just an advertisement for Homecoming Farm, but a truly analytical and all-encompassing news series. I chose to put this piece last because in order to understand the green sisters critics, the viewer must first understand the movement itself, as well as an example of that movement (found in Homecoming).

Arguably the most important aspect of a broadcast journalism news package is the video. Thus, the second creative approach was finding creative ways to shoot video that would enhance my storytelling abilities. While the shooting techniques are fairly simple, actually applying them in innovative and attention-grabbing ways can be difficult. Most journalists maintain the wide-medium-tight mindset, meaning that he or she shoots a wide shot to show the entire scene, then zooms in to two other closer shots that highlight a specific area, person, or object. This can get incredibly boring when the reporter does not use various camera angles or attempt to find a less obvious close-up than the main person or object. Therefore, my creative approach when shooting video was to not only convey what members and organizers were doing on the farm, but also make viewers feel like they were a part of the story. In part two, in which I described how the farm works, I tried to get many low-angle shots from the ground because that's where the members are working. It is easy to simply set the camera up on a tripod and shoot video from eye level, but in this case, that did not accurately display what it is like to physically be at the farm. By putting the camera on the ground and shooting close-ups of the members working, it gives viewers a real-life perspective, literally, of someone working on the farm. This kind of camera

work engages the viewer and make for a more interesting story, rather than just showing a wide-shot of the farm.

Similarly, I employed extreme close-ups frequently in order to provide more details for the viewer and to draw attention to specific reactions or situations. Extreme close-ups are not the most common type of shot in broadcast journalism pieces because it can be hard to focus tightly on a moving subject, and close-ups might not accurately convey the package's message because of their specificity. However, for my project, extreme close-ups actually benefitted several of the points I wanted to emphasize. In part 3, I discussed a specific outreach program Homecoming started at Centerlight Healthcare, an adult day-care facility where many residents suffer from diseases like dementia. One of the highlights in this program is the reaction of the elderly when Elizabeth Keihm, Homecoming's Executive Director, has them smell different flowers or taste different foods. In Keihm's words, it helps to engage their senses and jog some of their memory. While filming, I witnessed the elderly residents' faces shift from disinterest to happiness when they would taste, smell and feel the various crops. Thus, the best way to display this was through extreme close-ups that focused on the residents' facial expressions. These extreme close-ups helped enhance my story because they highlighted details that would not only convey the story more completely, but also bring it home for the viewer. It is very powerful to witness the moment when an elderly woman with dementia breaks into a smile because smelling a flower prods her memory. Thus, I chose to employ low-angle camera

shots and extreme close-ups often throughout the five parts in order to help viewers experience the stories, rather than simply showing and telling.

Finally, for part four of the series, I chose to use a creative approach that is particularly challenging for news packages and is not seen often on nightly news: a natural sound package. For those outside of the sphere of broadcast journalism, this is a story in which the reporter is not heard from or seen at all; it is all “natural sound,” as the name suggests, of interviewees and various sounds from the topic at hand. For my story, this included sound of water running, leaves crunching as someone walks through the farm, and a members talking. I chose to do this type of package for the part that discussed spiritual value because I could more accurately express the religious significance of the farm through the members’ words than my own. As the members are the ones actually experiencing the spiritual effects of working on the farm, it was more logical to have them tell the story versus me attempting to explain their emotions. While it was challenging to create a cohesive and logically-flowing story using only interviewee soundbites and no explanation from me, this creative decision allowed me to practice a different type of news package production, as well as present the topic of spiritual cohesion in religious diversity in a relatable and interesting way.

While much of the inspiration for these creative techniques came from my journalism education in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, another muse was the work of Boyd Huppert and Jonathan Malat, a reporter and videographer respectively, who work for KARE 11 TV in Minneapolis,

Minnesota. In the world of television journalism, the two are famous for their ability to weave storytelling and exciting video together to create vivid and educational news packages. They often employ extreme close-ups, natural sound, and unique camera angles in order to accomplish these types of outcomes. The strength of Huppert and Malat's reporting is that they bring the viewer into the story; their storytelling technique rotates between Huppert's voice, natural sounds, and interviews, thus giving it the feel of an in-person conversation rather than someone telling a story. This results in a story that is easy to understand and fascinating to a viewer. For my five-part news series, I tried to channel their storytelling techniques to improve the quality of my news packages. Thus, when writing the scripts, I made most of my reporter voice tracks concise, breaking them up with interesting interviewee quotes and natural sound. As a result, my five-part series became more than just a variety of news packages; it became an outlet for me to improve my storytelling and video-shooting abilities by focusing on lessons learned from Huppert and Malat.

These lessons especially came into play during the editing stage. Originally, I believed that I would be able to put together the five pieces and only edit each one time before having my final product. However, the editing stage proved to be the most time-consuming, yet also valuable, period of the project. It was here I was able to apply many of the writing and editing techniques that Huppert and Malat employ; it took several drafts of each script to finally cut down on unneeded words and phrases and add natural sound pops. After rewriting the scripts three or four times, I had a clearer understanding of how to organize the

video portion of the packages. Nonetheless, it still took three to four drafts to create a polished news piece. Reflecting on this, I found it difficult to go through such an intense editing stage because normally, a reporter only has one opportunity to craft a story. There is usually a tight deadline that a reporter must meet, and so there is no opportunity to rewrite and re-edit a news package. Thus, while this project became a wonderful example of my reporting, writing, and editing abilities, I am not accustomed to that kind of journalism experience. This is somewhat challenging for me moving forward in my career because I would like to spend as much time and effort on every story as I did each of the five parts of my Capstone, but know that it is virtually impossible in the fast-paced world of television news.

While editing decisions were an important part of my Capstone process, perhaps the key turning point in the success of the project was the decision to create a website to display my work. Over the past decade, the landscape of broadcast news has shifted from television to the internet. Rarely do people under age 30 sit down and watch an evening news broadcast. In this way, television news stations have had to bolster their online presence in order to keep viewers interested and constantly updated. Whether it be through employing social media, or simply posting breaking news and news packages on the station's website, a television news outlet that does not have a strong and fluid web presence will quickly lose relevance. As a reporter, I understand the need to be accessible to viewers through all different platforms. Thus, the decision to create a website was only logical in order to maintain credibility as a journalist in this digital era.

Prior to my Capstone, I had no experience with web design. However, with the assistance of Online and Multimedia Journalism Professor Seth Gitner, of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, I was able to create a visually-appealing and user-friendly page to accommodate my project's needs. Designing the website called for decision-making that I had not anticipated when approaching my Capstone. I needed to determine everything from a color scheme, to a layout, to what content I would include. In comparison to a news package, where editing is contained to just cutting video clips and adding necessary effects, a website required editing down to the very last detail, such as whether or not a certain body of text should be right, center, or left-aligned.

My greatest concern with designing the website was to choose a layout that would allow viewers to easily navigate between the five parts of my series, while also giving them access to some additional materials. As I had taken a significant amount of time determining the order of the packages, I wanted to make sure that my audience would watch them in that way. Originally, I planned to simply put one picture on the homepage, and put links to each story, in order, along the toolbar. However, after discussing this with Professor Gitner, it became clear that this would simply make my website look like an advertisement for Homecoming Farm, rather than a news series.

I thus decided to put six boxes on the homepage of the website that, when clicked, would redirect the viewer to the page for that specific story. The six boxes were the five parts of the series and a page describing my project. Each box was a picture that represented that part of the series, with a short title underneath

to give the viewer a better understanding of the topic. I chose to do this because it made the website easier to navigate and more attractive visually. Once the user clicks the picture and goes to the individual story page, they are able to read a short teaser and view the news package. In addition, I included a page with pictures and interview excerpts from my visits to the farm to give viewers a more complete look of life at Homecoming. In regards to texts and colors, I wanted to keep my website clean, modern and streamlined. I chose to make the color scheme green, gray, and black in order to make the significance of the Earth to the project and Homecoming Farm evident. Because the focus of my project is on the news packages, I did not want to clog my website with an overwhelming amount of text and color. Ultimately, my website complemented my project, without compromising its journalistic value.

Creating the website proved to be an invaluable experience because it allowed me to develop a new skill set, as well as create a professional display for my Capstone project. As stated earlier, having an understanding of the power of social media and the internet is essential for a news reporter. However, not many reporters can actually design a website with appropriate layout, text, and images. The production of my Capstone website has put me at a great advantage for future professional endeavors because it gives me a unique skill to separate me from other reporters. While it was challenging to learn the foundation and application of web design principles in just one semester, I found that the website truly tied together my creative approach together. Throughout the project, I had been

focused on sharp and concise writing, editing, video shooting and producing, and that was reflected in the user-friendly and visually-simple website.

While my creative process went relatively smoothly, I did face difficulty in regards to the location of my project. I reside in Philadelphia, and Homecoming Farm is located over two hours away on Long Island. I also had a part-time job and internship during the summer of 2012, while I was simultaneously trying to put an adequate amount of time into my visits to Homecoming. It seems that planning my visits several weeks ahead of time would solve this problem; however, various other unforeseen factors often changed my plans at the last minute. Most often, rain would cause the harvest day to be moved to a weekday instead of Saturday, thus not allowing me to go. The most frustrating part of the situation was that I could not simply do the research and video shooting for this project at home. I needed to be at the farm, and so any missed chance to visit was a serious roadblock.

Nonetheless, the location also proved to be one of the most rewarding aspects of my project because it allowed me to discover a new area and forced me to perform more background research. If I had done the project close to home or in Syracuse, I do not believe I would have done spent the proper amount of time investigating the area and its relationship to the topic, which ended up being an important aspect of my Capstone. Instead, I overcame any transportation and travel issues and spent more than enough time focused on research, observation, and journalism practice at Homecoming Farm. The location allowed for my

project to be a completely new learning experience, while still incorporating my education from Syracuse University.

As a result, this work truly represents the culmination of my academic studies and interests in both broadcast journalism and religion. In regards to journalism, this project represents the pinnacle of my work. By incorporating a variety of different journalistic strategies, such as concise writing, unique camera angles, and a multitude of natural sound, this project helped me develop my identity as a creative and innovative reporter. In addition, it allowed me to expand on the idea that different religious belief systems can overlap in regards to how and where they experience a spiritual connection. Rarely does one hear about a place where people of many different backgrounds are coming together and all experiencing some kind of “religious” experience simply through working with the Earth. However, by exploring the Green Sisters movement and this concept, I was able to express to a greater population exactly how unique and pioneering these “Earth ministries” are.

I would like viewers to understand my work in relation to the greater worldview of the divisiveness of religion. In today’s society, religion is cause for some of the most prominent and ongoing struggles worldwide. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Middle Eastern Shiite versus Sunni divide, and the shooting of an American Sikh temple in 2012 all display how difficult it can be for religious groups or sects to coexist peacefully. As religion itself is largely unchanging and rooted deeply in history, there is a minimal chance that these types of disagreements over religious sites, belief systems, or faith customs will

ever disappear. Thus, the solution to these religious debates is only for human beings to develop religious tolerance and learn to respect those of other faith backgrounds.

While the green sisters movement and Homecoming Farm are just a small thread in this worldwide religious fabric, they are still evident of how individuals can unite despite religious backgrounds. Homecoming members are Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and even Atheist, and yet each individual feels some kind of spiritual value when working with the Earth and participating in outreach programs. They each consider Homecoming a somewhat “holy” and spiritual place, despite their own religious backgrounds and experiences. In addition, every member is aware that the Sisters of Saint Dominic founded the farm, and yet this does not intimidate or drive away non-Catholics. Instead, they embrace the presence of another religion, while still maintaining their own practices and beliefs. In this way, I would like viewers to take that concept from my news series and apply it to their perception of religious divides around the world. While prejudice in a small town on Long Island may not be as rampant or violent as a suicide bomber in the Middle East, Homecoming is still an example of the potential for religious tolerance in today’s world.

In conclusion of my Capstone, I would like to acknowledge those who helped to make my project a success. Primarily, I could not have accomplished what I did without the help of Simon Perez, a Broadcast and Digital Journalism Professor in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. A journalist can report in a multitude of different ways, but there are only a few ways to be an

excellent reporter. Simon taught me the strategies and techniques to turn my reporting from good to great, and guided me throughout the Capstone process through constructive criticism and invaluable advice. He encouraged me to not be a “lazy reporter,” meaning interviewing that one extra person even if I thought I had enough material, or making sure to shoot more than enough video. It is not often that a young reporter gets to work closely with a veteran who has reported in markets as large as San Francisco, and so his experience and knowledge helped shape my project into its final outcome.

I would also like to acknowledge, once again, the help of Seth Gitner. Prior to my Capstone, I had never worked with Seth, and yet he embraced the project and spent an immense amount of time helping me create and rework my website. It was through his help that my website became a professional format for a news series, rather than just a blog or advertisement-type site. While I previously elaborated on the significance of the website to my project, I would like to reiterate the fact that I gained a completely new breadth of knowledge about web design that I had not expected to learn before starting my Capstone.

It is also extremely important for me to mention the help of Homecoming Farm Executive Director Elizabeth Keihm, Founder Sister Jeanne Clark, and all of the other members and organizers with whom I spoke. Attempting to learn about the entire history and daily activities of an organic farming project that has existed for over fifteen years can be an extremely daunting task. However, with the help and guidance of Elizabeth, Sister Jeanne, and several others, I was able to gain an immense amount of knowledge about Homecoming and the Earth

ministry movement over a few months. The interactions that I had with each person at Homecoming were also beneficial because I was able to practice and improve my interviewing techniques. When reflecting upon how I approached interviews prior to my Homecoming visits, I always seemed to keep it very short and formal. However, the friendly attitudes of Homecoming's members helped me to hone a more conversational interview approach. I have continued to use this interview method after my Capstone, and found that it elicits much better interview responses and creates a much more comfortable atmosphere.

Finally, I would like to thank the Renee Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University for the opportunity to complete this project. It was through the Honors program that I was able to find camera equipment, and also stay motivated to complete the Capstone. Creating this five-part news series and website proved to be intellectually stimulating and challenging, as well as beneficial to improving my reporting skills and my knowledge on religious diversity. Ultimately, my Honors Capstone project encompassed my passions of television news and religion in a way that mutually enhanced and proudly exhibited the two topics; through the five-part news series and website, viewers are able to learn about a unique religious movement through an innovative broadcast series.

Summary of Capstone Project

In twenty-first century American religious society, Catholic nuns are often stereotyped as only being teachers or “Mother Theresa” type figures. However, a new movement has taken shape over the past 30 years, in which religious sisters have dedicated their lives to an “Earth ministry.” While the exact details of an earth ministry ranges between convents and motherhouses, features often include an organic farm, sustainable practices, and earth-literacy programs that are designed to educate both the sisters and the surrounding community about the importance preserving the earth’s natural resources and both revering and respecting nature. The unique aspect of these earth ministries, commonly referred to as the “Green Sisters” movement, is that people of all religious backgrounds come together and connect over the spiritual value that comes from working with the earth. As a Broadcast and Digital Journalism major and Religion minor, I found this movement to be a fascinating story that would both interest television viewers and provide a unique perspective on religious community. While this movement is based in the Catholic Church, individuals from all religions, and even atheists, find spiritual value in these earth ministries through a re-inspired connection with nature.

While there are many examples of “Green Sisters” across the country, my project focused on the Community-Supported Agriculture organic farm Homecoming Farm, located in Amityville, New York on Long Island. I determined that the best way to comprehensively and accurately convey both the Green Sisters and Homecoming Farm was through a five-part news series that

would consist of three to five minute news packages, ranging in topic from the founding of the farm to its outreach programs to its critics. To properly display the videos for a large audience, I decided to also design a website to show the news packages, descriptions of my work, and additional interviews and pictures from my visits.

In order to understand the Green Sisters, it is first necessary to understand Father Thomas Berry and Professor Brian Swimme's book *The Universe Story*. Thomas Berry is a geologian, a combination of geologist and theologian who researches and writes about the relationship between spirituality, the cosmos, and the physical earth. Brian Swimme is a cosmologist who studies mainly the origins and future of the universe. Together, they collaborated and researched for 10 years to write *The Universe Story*. This story provides a "new narrative" for human beings to reconcile the scientific story of creation with the theological story, in order for people to reconnect with nature and the earth. It goes in-depth to describe what we know about how the universe and earth began, and how we must relate that to our current lives in order to treat the Earth with respect. *The Universe Story* ultimately became the foundation for the Green Sisters movement when Sister Miriam MacGillis, of the Sisters of Saint Dominic in Caldwell, New Jersey, met with Thomas Berry to discuss his theological ideals in the book. This inspired Sister Miriam to begin Genesis Farm, a 231-acre community-supported farm, eco-literacy center, and environmentally protected area in New Jersey. The mission of Genesis Farm, and nearly every other Green Sisters project, is to

convey the principles of *The Universe Story* that help people regain respect for the Earth through various educational programs and organic farms.

Homecoming Farm is modeled after Genesis Farm, and began as a result of a retreat at Genesis Farm that Sister Jeanne Clark, of the Sisters of Saint Dominic in Amityville, attended in the early 1990s. When she returned to Amityville, Clark decided to pursue starting a similar type of farm at the Sisters of Saint Dominic Motherhouse. At the same time, Sister Virginia Maguire and a group of sisters were meeting weekly to discuss global interdependence and environmental awareness, as well as how these concepts could be taught to the community. Maguire and Clark collaborated and, in 1992, came up with the idea of Homecoming Farm. At that time, they named the project Sophia Garden, and planned and fundraised for four years before securing a plot of land on grounds of the motherhouse in 1996. The project grew rapidly, and in 2006 moved to a larger area of the motherhouse's land to accommodate its new size. Today, it is a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) project, meaning members pay a fee (in this case, \$475) and commit to volunteer at the farm for 15 hours in exchange whatever crops the farm may grow. In 2012, Homecoming Farm grew over 100 varieties of fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs and other crops. The farm has filled its member capacity, which currently sits at a little over 40 families. While it began as a project for the Sisters of Saint Dominic and their congregation, it is open to people of all religious, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds. On the basis of *The Universe Story*, its goal is to not only practice organic farming and

treat the Earth with respect, but also to foster a deeper spiritual connection between members and nature.

For my five-part news series, I took five of the main components of the farm and delved into each one in its own news package, which in Broadcast Journalism terms means a television news story that includes several interviews and a visual of the reporter speaking on the topic. I visited the farm for over 30 hours throughout the summer and fall of 2012 in order to observe, conduct interviews, and shoot video. I shot, wrote, edited and produced each part of the series. In part one, I address the founding of Homecoming Farm and the basis of the Green Sisters movement in *The Universe Story*. I spoke with Sister Jeanne Clark and Sister Virginia Maguire to more completely understand both the story and the struggles that accompanied starting an organic farm. In part two, I transition from its humble beginnings to where the farm is today. I spoke with head farmer Donald Cimato, Director of Education Christine Keihm, and Executive Director Elizabeth Keihm, as well as several members of the farm. This piece includes information on both the types of organic farming practices the farm uses and the resulting ways in which they encourage acceptance of a diverse religious population.

For part three, I expand on what the farm does today by discussing its various outreach programs. Amityville is located in an interesting socio-economic region, as it is fairly close to the borough of Queens in New York City, but directly situated in a suburban, middle-class area. As a result, there are a variety of different people and backgrounds that the founders and organizers of

Homecoming encourage to come visit and learn about the farm. One of the first programs that Clark started was an educational class in schools in Queens that taught elementary school students *The Universe Story* and the significance of respecting the Earth. This program also includes students visiting the farm and learning about the organic practices, such as composting. The main focus of the package, however, is a program at Centerlight Healthcare, an adult day-care facility located in the Sisters of Saint Dominic motherhouse. Many of the residents are elderly Dominican sisters suffering from diseases like dementia; in the program, Elizabeth Keihm brings crops from the farm to teach about locally grown food and healthy eating, as well as attempt to jog the memories of the sisters through various smells and tastes of flowers and food. The package also touches upon the work that Homecoming has done with various Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, such as planting a berry patch and building a shed.

In part four, I discuss the various religious backgrounds of the farm members, and how the community at the farm finds spirituality in different ways. I took another approach to the news package and decided to make it an only natural sound piece. This means that the viewer does not hear the reporters voice throughout the piece, but instead only hears natural sounds and quotes from the interviewees. The piece involves members describing their spiritual experiences at the farm, whether they are religious or not. Finally, in part five, I address the issue of those who may critique what the Sisters of Saint Dominic are doing at Homecoming Farm. There are many people both inside and outside of the church who disagree with the Green Sisters movement; in the church, hierarchy believe it

is encouraging nature worship, while outside, people think that religious sisters should focus on helping the poor or teaching. However, Homecoming has debunked both of these critiques through its lack of formal religious ceremony at the farm, and its partnership with the Interfaith Nutrition Network. The INN provides food for the homeless and hungry on Long Island, and Homecoming has started to donate its leftover food to its soup kitchen. Last year, they downloaded over 2,600 pounds of food.

Ultimately, the significance of this project is to share with the viewer the religious importance of the relatively unknown Green Sisters movement through the works of Homecoming Farm. It highlights the novelty of this movement, as well as its attempt to shift human connection to the Earth and nature towards that of respect, instead of its current one of destruction. In addition, farms like Homecoming function to connect individuals of different religious backgrounds in an atmosphere that is not blatantly spiritual or religious. Its message of global awareness helps send the message that human beings cannot continue to use the earth's natural resources without consequence. Finally, through a five-part news series and website, I introduce the many aspects of Homecoming Farm and the unique spiritual connection it helps to develop between its members and the Earth.

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