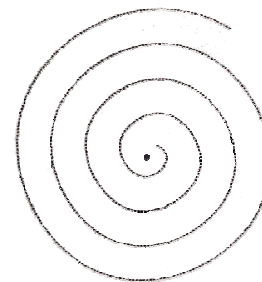


Franciscan Cosmic Walk

Presented at “Creation as the Body of God” conference
Center for Action and Contemplation
Albuquerque, NM July 17, 2010



We begin tonight with a beautiful ritual that was originally created by Sr. Miriam MacGillis at Genesis Farm, inspired by the work of Thomas Berry. The Cosmic Walk is a meditative, candle-lit retelling of the Universe Story—the act of creation itself. As we experience this meditation, we will behold the creation of our Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and our brother and sister creatures, the unfolding of the universe and the beautiful blue-green planet which is home to us all. We will gather outside around a spiral as we listen to the story. One person will walk our spiral for us, walking us through each event of our story, lighting a candle to represent milestones in the evolution of life along the way. 13.7 billion years is a VERY long time, very difficult for our human brains to comprehend!! Visually watching the spiral walk as we listen will help us begin to glimpse the vastness of time and the miracle of the story of our cosmic and evolutionary journey.

*The ribbon that makes up the spiral is 137 feet long, which means that every foot represents **one hundred million years**. That means that ten feet of our spiral represent one billion years! The Cosmic Walk is a way of bringing our knowledge of the 13.7-billion-year unfolding of our Universe from our heads to our hearts, re-awakening the wisdom within each of us that all of Creation truly is the body of God, and that we ourselves are an expression of this great, mysterious unfolding process.*

In recent centuries, science has often found itself at odds with religion. Today, through the New Science, scientists have encountered—through scientific methods—the unfathomable mysteries that mystics of all great religious traditions have always sensed—that all of Creation is intricately interconnected and holy. Science and spirituality can now complement each other in our time, reminding us both of the urgency of our ecological crisis and the spirit which permeates all the universe. When we reconnect to that which is most sacred and life-giving to us all—the birth of all creation, we begin to see ourselves as an expression of this sacred, awesome, unfolding event. With this becomes a dawning realization that we can co-create within and through this inherently creative and sacred evolutionary process. We can discover our own Great Work in bringing about a life-sustaining, beautiful world for all future beings to enjoy.

In the tradition of the creation stories that have been told throughout time, the Universe Story takes current scientific discoveries and weaves them into a story, for only a story is capable of conveying the mystery and wonder of the story of the creation of God’s masterpiece—the unfolding of all of creation! For our purposes here tonight, we will also hear the beautiful and inspired words of St. Francis of Assisi. His Canticle of the Creatures will be interwoven throughout the story, reflecting the spiritual connection he sensed 800 years ago when he contemplated creation. It is his sense of awe and wonder that we aspire to here together this weekend. Tonight, may this ritual help you reconnect to the sacredness which permeates the All, and may this experience help you connect with your unique place in this Great Story.



Supplies and set-up: 31 tea lights, one taper candle, one center candle, 137 foot rope, set up in a spiral in an indoor or outdoor space at least 10'x10', with a walkway at least 2 feet wide. Place votive candles according to the measurements given at each section, with a marker at each station so that later, walkers can walk through on their own with a prompt about each of significance of each candle. A detailed description of the set-up can be found at <http://www.threeeyesofuniverse.org/public/Stuff/CosmicWalks/MiriamCosmicWalk.pdf>

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Reader 1:

The Cosmic Walk is a ritual created by Sr. Miriam MacGillis of Genesis Farm. It has been told and retold countless times and experienced by many people around the world. The Cosmic Walk is a way of bringing our knowledge of the 13.7-billion-year Universe process from our heads to our hearts.

Reader 2:

Some of what you will hear may sound very scientific and full of facts. Actually, this Cosmic Walk is a simple ritual that is more of an experiential meditation than a learning exercise. I encourage you to relax and just pay attention, no need to learn any of the numbers or facts. Just let your ears, your eyes and your hearts experience the mystery behind the story we are about to tell.

Reader 3:

*The spiral you see in front of you represents the unfolding of the entire 13.7 billion years of our cosmic and evolutionary journey. This spiral ribbon is 137 feet long, which means that **every foot** of this rope represents **one hundred million years!** Or, put another way, every 10 feet represents **one billion years!** There are obviously too many important events in an unfolding of an entire Universe to talk about each one. Tonight, to help us in our understanding of this sacred story, we will mention some of the most important milestones along the way. Each “primordial act” which occurred in the drama of the emergence of our Universe will be marked by a candle. The first candle, located at the very center of our spiral, represents the Great Emergence of the Universe itself, the Original Flaring Forth. Our walker will walk through our spiral as our Great Story is told, and after this, everyone else will have an opportunity to walk the spiral if they wish. But for now, just sit back and witness the story of this amazing event which is still unfolding today...*

(Start music, Fairy Ring by Michael Rowland)

**(o) From the void, from the dark, comes the light and the spark...**

*(Walker light central candle... pause. When first (long) reading is finished and chime is sounded, light your taper candle).*

|                                                                   |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. Great Emergence 13.7 billion years ago. (CENTER CANDLE)</b> |
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**(1)** Some 13.7 billion years ago, a **great ball of fire expands outwards into the creation of the Universe** - space and time, shadows and light. In that first second, the light is everywhere and everything. Its heat is incredible - perhaps a trillion degrees centigrade at first. A heat such as this cannot be maintained for long. As you know, hot air rises. When we think of rising, we think of up. When we think of up, we think of down, but there is no up or down at the beginning. There is only out, and out goes this ball of fire creating and filling space as it expands into the creation of the Universe.

The heat is so intense that nothing can hold its shape. Each point in the Universe is on fire. In this first second, there are no laws and nothing is permanent. Everywhere there is light bumping into itself, jostling, cracking its own particles out of existence only to draw others back in through some invisible line of primordial attraction.

As the Universe expands, space is created and for the first time there is room to create new forms and to bond together in the first enduring relationships. Shadows become possible. Light can dance. Particles of light—photons—emerge from the Primordial Flaring Forth. Imagine the zig-zag dance that these first particles perform in the dawn of time's creation!

As space unfurls, energy begins to pack itself more and more tightly. Density gives shape to matter—and gradually, mysteriously grows. When the Universe cools sufficiently, a single electron and proton can join to create hydrogen, the simplest and most abundant element in the Universe. Hydrogen is an energy that creates change and causes the Universe to adapt in new orderly patterns. Eventually, as hydrogen fuses with other nuclei, helium is formed.

**(Ring chime, walker light taper from central candle and walk slowly to next candle, light it, pause...)**

**(2) Galaxies: A billion years later (10 FEET FROM CENTER)**

**(2) \*Over the next billion years, galaxies come forth.** (Pause) Stars are born, live, and die. (Pause) As they live, stars transform their hydrogen and helium into heavier elements: carbon, oxygen, aluminum. (Pause) Many of these stars die and cool slowly to become dark tombs. But the larger stars in their death throes explode, become supernovas, blasting out to the cosmos their precious gifts of selenium, boron, lithium, iron. These treasures are gathered together and supplemented in the life of second generation stars. (Long pause) Supernovas are the mothers of the Universe, creating in their wombs the elements of life. Birth, death, and resurrection are ancient themes of the Universe.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly to next candle, while readers read next section. Light the candle, pause...)**

**(3) The Sun: 4.6 billion years ago (46 FEET FROM END)**

**We praise You, Lord, for Brother Sun,  
who is the day through whom You give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor,  
of You Most High, he bears your likeness.**

**(3) (Long pause...)** Over the next 10 billion years, our Grandmother Star becomes a supernova. (Long pause...) 4.6 billion years ago, she gives up her life in an explosion that gives rise to our Star, what we call **the Sun**.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly to next candle while the next section is being read, light it, pause...)**

**(4) Our Solar System: 4.5 billion years ago (45 FEET FROM END)**

**We praise You, Lord, for Sister Moon and the stars,  
in the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.**

**(4) \*4.5 billion years ago, our Solar System forms from the remains of the supernova explosion.** Many of the atoms from the exploding supernova star are too heavy to form a new star and begin to form themselves into planets circling around our Sun, which is made of the lightest elements. Here begins the story of what will become one blue-and-white pearl of a planet.

Great Bombardment! Comets and meteorites pelt the Earth's thickening crust as it cools off. The moon is born when Earth is impacted by a Mars-sized body that causes the Earth to tilt to the side, giving rise to the seasons of the year.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

(5) Sister Water, rain and weather: 4.4 - 4.1 billion years (42 FEET FROM END)

**We praise You, Lord, for Sister Water,  
so useful, humble, precious and pure.**

(5) \*4.4 - 4.1 billion years ago - Over hundreds of millions of years, Earth has grown from dust particles to a large, hot, molten planet with a thin rocky crust. The crust thickens, and cracks and exuberant volcanoes expel hotly agitated deep Earth magma to the surface.

As the young molten Earth quiets and cools, an atmosphere begins to form. **As steam condenses above the Earth, the miracle of rain and weather cycles begin.** The first rains fall, then torrential rains fall on, and on, and on until rivers run over the land and pool into great seas. In these newly formed oceans a rich variety of chemicals gather together to birth the wonder of life.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

(6) The emergence of Life: 4 billion years ago (40 FEET FROM END)

(6) \*4 billion years ago... In the boiling waters, organic chemicals, perhaps sojourners from outer space, catalyze themselves into life. The rich chemical brew brings forth invisibly small creatures that we call bacteria. **The first living cells! ...and the Earth comes alive.** Gaia is born.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

(7) Photosynthesis: 3.9 billion years ago (39 FEET FROM END)

(7) \*3.9 billion years ago, cells invent **Photosynthesis.** Small creatures learn to capture the sun and store the energy chemically—suckling the energy from the Sun and making it available to the web of life. These early blue green algae take hydrogen for photosynthesis directly from the seas. Since water is made of hydrogen and oxygen, this early diet breaks the atomic bond of water and leaves oxygen floating free into the air. Similarly, carbon is taken from atmospheric carbon dioxide, and oxygen is emitted. Although we think of oxygen as a helpful element, it becomes a deadly corrosive gas when it becomes too highly concentrated. Eventually, oxygen piles up in the atmosphere and threatens life. **The first great extinction spasm takes place in a mass of lifeless chemicals.**

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(8) Cooperation! 1.8 billion years later (20 FEET FROM END)**

**(8) \*1.8 billion years later, or 2 billion years ago, oxygen-loving cells emerge.** The first global environmental crisis is averted by the creativity of these tiny cellular creatures who invent a use for oxygen as they breathe it in (like we do) and use its energy. Cooperatives emerge as individual single-cell organisms learn to cooperate and specialize within giant cell cooperatives. Perhaps this begins as one cell forces its way into another, refusing to leave. Eventually some evolve into symbiotic relationships. Within one cell membrane, some bacteria specialize in photosynthesis, others make food, and still others move the organism here and there. Eventually, a new kind of gene pool or information center is set up as each bacteria gives up some of its DNA to a common gene pool which becomes the shared cell nucleus. The individual parts become less independent but more secure, more inseparable parts of the new wholes. These types of organisms are the same stuff of all plants and animals today. In the communion of a larger, single cell, **cooperation is the emergent quality of the life force.**

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(9) Sexual reproduction: 1 billion years ago (15 FEET FROM END)**

**(9) 11 billion years ago, sexual procreation emerges.** Single-celled organisms learn to share their genetic heritage and bequeath to their progeny an extravagance of possibilities.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(10) Death becomes a condition for creative life: 800 million years ago (10 FT FROM END)**

**(10) 800 million years ago, death is invented.** Single-celled beings relinquish their immortality and enter into a great variety of novel relationships creating multi-celled sexual beings. Later, life invents purposeful cell death to facilitate the growth of these multi-celled organisms and the florescence of complex life. **Death becomes a condition for creative life.**

**We praise You, Lord, for Sister Death,  
from whom no living being can escape.**

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(11) Community! First multicellular organisms: 700 million years ago (7 FT FROM END)**

**(11) 700 million years ago the first multi-cellular organisms emerge.** Some single-celled organisms begin living together in colonies and find ways to communicate with each other using chemical messages. This ability to communicate soon becomes useful in many new ways of cooperating, especially in divisions of labor among different cells: some cells specialize in making food, others break food down and digest it, and still others specialize in sexual reproduction of the organism as a whole. At this time, life on Earth discovers Community through the rise of multi-cellular organisms.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(12) Sight! 600 million years ago (6 FEET FROM END)**

**(12) \*600 million years ago, light sensitive eyespots evolve into eyesight.** The Earth sees herself for the first time and is dazzled!

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(13) Shells, beaks, jaws, skeletons! Algae, mosses, insects! 460 million years ago  
(4 ½ FEET FROM END)**

**(13) The first animals to evolve in the oceans are soft-bodied.** Over the next 70 million years, previously naked animals protect themselves with shells. Jaws, beaks, and skeletons follow suit. 460 million years ago—Leaving the water, animals such as worms and mollusks and crustaceans seek the adventure of breathing air, surviving weather, and raising themselves against gravity. Algae and fungi venture ashore as well. The first plants evolve as mosses. Insects evolve with nearly weightless bodies that permit even more movement than the other creatures.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(14) Age of Reptiles: 439 million years ago (4 1/3 FEET FROM END)**

**(14) 439 million years ago, global environmental change and continental glaciation precipitate the second great extinction spasm.** Over half of the species worldwide decline and then vanish. As with each of these spasms, this sets the stage for the explosion of great novelty into the vacuum created by the emptying out of so many niches for life. Within 25 million years, Earth recovers its rich biodiversity, much of it with new creatures.

The first **amphibian** animals hop and lumber onto land, trading in their gill slits for air-breathing lungs, transforming fins into stubby legs and continuing to return to the water to lay their eggs... Frogs and toads!

The **first forests** evolve. Over generations, these forests load themselves with carbon extracted from the atmosphere which later becomes fossilized as coal and oil. As the forests spread, amphibians transform into pre-reptilian creatures with the grand innovation of self contained eggs that allows them to move inland. **The Great Age of Reptiles begins.**

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(15) Dinosaurs: 235 million years ago (2 1/2 FEET FROM END)**

**(15) 235 million years ago.** Following the 4th and greatest mass extinction, we see the **emergence of dinosaurs.** For 170 million years these creatures flourish, exploring the extremes of size, speed, and strength. Dinosaurs, sometimes as large as 40 meters, are social animals that often travel and hunt in groups. Dinosaurs develop a behavioral novelty unknown previously in the reptilian world—parental care. Some of them carefully bury their eggs and stay with the young after they hatch, nurturing them toward independence.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(16) First mammals: 225 million years ago (2 1/4 FEET FROM END)**

**(16) 225 million years ago, the first mammals emerge.** Inhabiting small niches in a world of giants, these small and nocturnal mammals jump, climb, swing, and swim through a world of giants. Some rodent-sized insect-eaters evolve lactation, enabling mothers to spend more time in the nest keeping their young both fed and warm. The Universe, once molten rock, has reshaped itself to be able to express a mother's love for her child!

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(17) Earth takes Flight!! Birds: 150 million years ago (1 ½ FEET FROM END)**

**(17) 150 million years ago. Birds emerge** as direct descendants of certain dinosaurs whose foreleg bones evolve into wing bones, jawbones into beaks, and scales into feathers. Far larger than today's birds, wing spans are as large as 12 meters. Birds follow the insects into the vast vault of the sky—airborne!! Earth teaches herself to fly!

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(18) Flowers and pollination: 114 million years ago (1 FOOT FROM END)**

**We praise You, Lord, for Sister Earth,  
who sustains us  
with her fruits, colored flowers, and herbs.**

**(18) 114 million years ago. Flowers evolve** gorgeous colors, perfumes, and delightful nectars, making them irresistible to insects. Whereas a conifer requires 18 months to produce its seeds, a flower can grow from seed to a mature plant capable of releasing its own seeds, all in a few weeks. Insects, drawn to the nectar, unknowingly transport pollen from one flower to the next, fertilizing the plants on which they feed. **The Earth adorns herself magnificently in color and invites the sky creatures into a new dance---pollination!**

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(18a) Extinction of dinosaurs, Age of Mammals: 65 million years ago (8 INCHES FROM END)**

**(18a) \*65 million years ago** - Shortly after primates appear on the scene, an asteroid 6 miles in diameter hits the Yucatan peninsula leading, in time, to a severe drop in temperature and the **5th mass extinction. This marks the end of the age of dinosaurs and the beginning of the age of mammals.** With the dinosaurs gone, the once dark and sheltered small mammals stride into daylight, and are given unlimited opportunities to explore new habitats, new food and new varieties of size, shape, defenses, and creative expressions. This new community of animals, plants, birds and insects produce the great florescence of Earth life which will last 65 million years: the Earth greets rodents, whales, monkeys, horses, cats and dogs, antelopes, gibbons, grazing animals, orangutans, gorillas, elephants, chimpanzees, camels, bears, pigs, baboons and the first humans. **The Age of Mammals!**

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(19) Humans: 4 million years ago (1/2 INCH FROM END)**

**(19) \*4 million years ago. The first humans leave the forest, stand up, and walk on two legs.** The savannah offers the challenges and opportunities for these early creatures to evolve into humans with brains and nervous systems complex enough that Earth would eventually bring forth a conscious self-awareness of itself. These humans move over the surface of the Earth, eventually spreading themselves over all six continents.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(20) Language: 150 thousand years ago**

**(20) 150 thousand years ago, modern humans & language emerge.** Pondering Earth and cosmos in their range of beauty and harshness, humans shape language, art, music, and ritual to respond to the mysteries of existence. Shamanic and goddess religions, and the language and art to express these, become integral with human life.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(21) Agriculture: 11,000 years ago**

**(21) 11,000 years ago, human farming and herding emerge.** Agriculture is invented. Humans begin to shape the environment, deciding which species shall live and which shall die.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(22) Writing, modern religions: 3,000 years ago**

**(22) 3,000 years ago. Over several thousand years, humans invent writing** and more complex technologies and with them arise a variety of religious perspectives that gradually become institutionalized as Hinduism, Confucianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(23) Newton's mechanistic view of the Universe: 300 years ago**

**(23) A little over 300 years ago (1687), Isaac Newton firmly establishes the modern, mechanistic view of the Universe,** which catalyzes our modern scientific revolution and eventually permeates all aspects of human society—education, medicine, law, religion, and how we view and treat our planetary home. Scientists begin to calculate the Age of the Earth. Humans try to understand how old the Earth is through empirical observations.

**(Ring chime, walk slowly...)**

**(24) Last passenger pigeon dies: 90 years ago**

**(24) 90 years ago—1914—the last passenger pigeon dies** in captivity, and humans realize the sobering fact that we can unwittingly cause the extinction of even the most populous animals.  
*(Ring chime, walk slowly...)*

**(25) Discovery of an expanding Universe: 75 years ago**

**(25) 75 years ago—1929—astronomers observe the expansion of the Universe.** After 2 1/2 million years, humans are aware for the first time that they live in a developing universe, one with itself from the beginning.

*(Ring chime, walk slowly...)*

**(26) Discovery of DNA: 50 years ago**

**(26) 1953, humans discover DNA,** life's common language. This fundamental mode of memory and communication has been shared by all life for four billion years. It carries the record of our embeddedness in—and dependence on—the great web of life.

*(Ring chime, walk slowly...)*

**(27) Big Bang Theory: 43 years ago**

**(28) 1965, scientists observe the origin of the Universe.** The cosmic background radiation, still streaming from the Great Emergence, is observed by humans for the first time.

*(Ring chime, walk slowly...)*

**(28) First picture of Earth from space: 38 years ago**

**(28) 1969—just 35 years ago--Earth sees herself as whole for the first time.** Earth becomes complex enough to witness her own fragile beauty when astronauts travel into space and see through their own eyes our blue-green jewel of a planet. The photographs they bring back to humans back home capture our imagination and evoke our awe. Earth's choices for the future are now entwined with human judgment and activities. This understanding is deeply felt with an awe and a poignancy never before experienced.

*(Ring chime, walk slowly...)*

**(29) Modern environmental crisis: 18 years ago to present**

**(29) Early 1990's**, a growing recognition that humans are inadvertently causing the **sixth major mass extinction in the history of the universe**, as humans become more aware of the effects of their choices on our planetary home.

*(Ring chime, walk slowly...)*

**(30) Hubble telescope begin to uncover this story: 17 years ago**

**(30) 1995, the Hubble deep field photo** stuns us with its beauty and the vast number of galaxies calculated to exist. The discoveries of science offer humans images of the astounding beauty of our Universe. These images evoke awe and inspiration and possess the power to propel us forward towards a life-affirming way of being with our planet.

**We praise and bless You, Lord, and give You thanks,  
and serve You in all humility.**

*(Ring chime, walk slowly...)*

**(31) Today**

**(31) Today the Story of the Universe can be told as our sacred Story.** The creativity implicit in the Great Emergence and expressed in the remarkable longing of Earth for life continues as this moment, in us, as one.

*(Ring chime, walk slowly...)*

*(Pause.) Now we will all have a chance to walk the cosmic walk spiral. Please take as long as you like to walk it. There may be several people in the spiral at once: feel free to pause once in awhile, or to pass others, depending on your speed. Keeping silence, just go at your own pace. Once you are finished we will return to the circle, forming a circle around the spiral to hold this sacred space.*

*(Play "We Are" by Sweet Honey in the Rock)*

*(It can be fun to have one or two people at the exit of the spiral to "anoint" the walkers with glitter as they finish their walk: You are made of stardust, you are the dream of the universe made manifest...)*

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Compiled by Pam Wood from resources listed below. Updated July 14, 2010. www.sacredgroundhealing.com

Sources:

I have created this version of the Cosmic Walk over many years of leading this ritual with a variety of audiences. I borrowed heavily from other people's Cosmic Walk scripts to arrive at this version:

- **Miriam MacGillis** (original creator of the Cosmic Walk ritual). Genesis Farm website: <http://www.genesisfarm.org/>. Miriam's original version of the Cosmic Walk: <http://threeeyesofuniverse.org/public/Stuff/CosmicWalks/MiriamsCosmicWalk.pdf>
- **Ruth Rosenhek**, teacher and workshop facilitator in deep ecology and spiritual activism. Her version is based on the works of Elisabet Sahtouris, John Fowler and Lynn Margulis: <http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/deep-eco/cosmic.htm>
- **Larry Edwards**, teacher of Earth Literacy and the New Cosmology at Genesis Farm (where he lives), California Institute of Integral Studies, and Wisdom University. Larry posts his and several other versions of the Cosmic Walk at <http://www.threeeyesofuniverse.org/public/Stuff/CosmicWalks/TheCosmicWalk.html>

Instructions for Readers and Walker:

Reader 1: Read all black text

Reader 2: Read all blue text

Reader 3: Read all green text

Readers: Each candle represents one number or "station" in the script. When the chime is sounded, begin the reading for that station. There are times when more than one reader will read for each station. When you finish reading each station, wait until you hear the chime before you begin to read the next station. Give plenty of time between readers. There may be long periods of silence between readings where we watch the walker walk through billions of years, and other times, she may arrive at her next candle before you finish speaking.

Walker: Standing in the middle, you will wait until the Cosmic Walk is introduced. Then, when you hear "From the light, from the dark, comes the light and the spark", light the center large candle. Then, **continue to stand** in the center while the first section is read, describing the great ball of fire expanding outwards... **When the chime is sounded, light your taper candle.** Then, begin walking as the next reader reads the stories of the galaxies. **When you get to the next candle, stop** (the reader may finish before or after you). **When the chime is sounded, light that candle.** When the next reader begins reading, begin walking again until you get to the next candle, and stop. When the bell is sounded, light the candle, and again begin walking when you hear the next reader begin to read...and so on.

1. Always keep the rope to your right side!! Walk slowly and intentionally, no hurry!
2. Always stop when you get to the next candle, light the candle and wait.
3. Always start walking again **only after** you hear the bell chime.