



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

618.466.5004 • 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035 • info@lavistaelc.org

Winter/Spring 2019  
Volume 17 Issue 48

## Mission for Earth: An Oblate's Journey

by John Lasseigne

Fr. Darrell Rupiper was a friend of Earth. He was an Oblate priest and missionary. In the 1970s his religious order, the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, sent him to work in poor communities in Brazil. This was during the era that a military junta governed the country. The junta's disrespect for human rights and use of violence to achieve its goals opened the eyes of the rural boy from Iowa. His experience in Brazil gave him a lifelong zeal for social justice and the defense of human rights.

After working in Brazil for more than a decade, Fr. Darrell returned to the United States. He served as a parish priest in various places throughout the Midwest. For a long while he was pastor of a predominately African American parish in Chicago. Later, he served as the director of the novitiate (seminary) of his religious order, where he helped in the training and preparation of future priests. He taught his parishioners and seminarians to see religion as more than the happenings inside the walls of a church. He taught them by example to be active in their communities. He spoke out and acted against the death penalty, racism, and nuclear weapons and on behalf of the poor, the marginalized, and minorities.

Priesthood according to Fr. Darrell's style is difficult to live in any age, but came to seem especially difficult in the later years of Pope John Paul II's papacy. In that time the Catholic Church seemed to turn inward, focusing more on matters of doctrinal purity and sexual ethics. Thus, there came a time when Fr. Darrell grew discouraged, so discouraged that he thought about leaving the priesthood.

But he did not leave. Instead, he discovered another cause that inspired him and sustained his priesthood right up until his death in 2009.

Discovering that passion was like undergoing a second—or maybe a third or fourth—conversion. That passion was care for Earth and God's creation. I don't recall exactly, but I am pretty sure that this conversion came through his

reading of the author Thomas Berry. Berry was also a Catholic priest who wrote about creation, culture, science, the history of the cosmos, and humankind's ongoing destruction of the planet. It was reading Thomas Berry, I believe, that gave Darrell a new sense of urgency to his priesthood. He realized that we humans have a tremendous need to change the way we relate to other animals and to the planet. He also came to believe that he could do more for Earth's cause by remaining in the priesthood than he could outside, as a layperson.

So, Fr. Darrell asked his superiors for permission to be

free from all institutional ministries, like parishes and seminaries. He asked to be free to travel around the country as an ecological missionary—giving talks, workshops, prayer services, and retreats in whatever parishes or communities that would be willing to listen to him. And many parishes and communities did invite him. It helped that Fr. Darrell belonged to a

religious order that had a network of parishes throughout the United States. It also helped that he was naturally sociable with a great gift for telling jokes and stories and putting people at ease. He also had a vast store of life experiences from which to draw.

In his presentations, he taught his listeners to call the earth "Earth" with a capital letter E, and dropping the article "the". Calling Earth by its own proper name, as we call our friends Cameron, or Joan, or Pamela, was to recognize Earth's integrity, dignity, and sacredness. He invited people to remember their most powerful experiences of nature from their past, most often from their childhood or youth. These memories triggered a sense of tenderness toward Earth that many of us lose in later years.

He taught people to beware of falling prey to the three C's: comfort, cost, and convenience. Many of our

*(Continued on page 3)*



### Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends of La Vista,

Greetings from La Vista as we begin a new year in this beautiful region where bald eagles are soaring over the bluffs and winter has us in its embrace. Wherever you are, my hope is that you are relishing your place in the great web of life.

I am still being fed by a conference I recently attended led by James Hollis, author of *Living an Examined Life*. Hollis, Jungian analyst and teacher, shared twenty-one tasks for each of us who strives to live intentionally during this transition time on our planet and in our culture. Each task, he warned, is challenged by two human traits that bedevil us: fear and lethargy. Hollis explains this with a homey and poignant image: "each morning twin gremlins – fear and lethargy – sit at the foot of our bed and smirk. Fear of further departure, fear of the unknown, fear of the challenge of largeness intimidates us back into our convenient rituals, conventional thinking, and familiar surroundings. To be recurrently intimidated by the task of life is spiritual annihilation.

I chose this piece of wisdom from the conference to share because the page one article in this issue provides an excellent example of someone who did not allow fear and lethargy to guide his life. The author John Lasseigne paints a picture of Darrell Rupiper as one who had the insight to determine how he needed to change, the courage to create a new path and the endurance to see it through to his untimely death in 2009. My thanks to John for reminding us of Darrell's remarkable Oblate life and his commitment to care of Earth.

What about you? Do the "twin gremlins" have you in their grip this wintertime? As one way to escape them, I invite you to join us for one or more of our programs offered in the calendar of events.

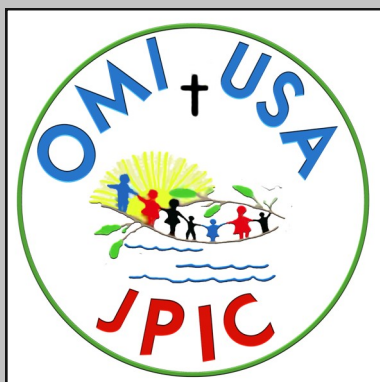


For La Vista,  
Maxine Pohlman,  
SSND

Sister Maxine with  
Novices Democracy  
Mudenda, Mark Her-  
nandez, and David  
Chisha (L to R)

## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human Earth Relationship

The following quote is taken from the inspiring new OMI document *Companion in Mission*. This important message applies to Oblates and to all of us who care for our common home.



### Can We Remain Indifferent?

*"At the root of the challenges facing our world today lie questions concerning values, meaning and spirituality. **It is becoming more and more evident that the major problems of our time cannot be understood in isolation, and that they are all interconnected and interdependent. This insight is giving rise to new ways of comprehending the human presence on Earth and our place within the great web of life.** Our situation demands a radical shift in our thinking, our perception and our values. In the search for a way of living that enables the flourishing of human life and that is characterized by*

*right relationships, sustainability, respect for the human dignity of all, sensitivity to ecological realities and awareness of the sacredness of life, the Church – and the Oblates – have a crucial role to play.*

*This is the work of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. It is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that compels us to go out, like him, with compassion and love, to the crowds of the poor and suffering people, and to take their side.*

*We as missionaries are called to bear witness to the religious dimension of the human journey and to the ethical and spiritual aspects of life on our planet Earth."*

Download the entire document from the OMI web site:

<https://www.omiworld.org/resources/library/public-documents/>

## Do Animals Speak? by David Chisha, NOMI

One day someone said to me, "Do you know that animals speak to us human beings?" I did not understand; so then I asked how this is possible or which language can animals use to speak to human beings. Confidently that person said to me, "It is possible, and they do speak every language". To preserve my precious time from listening to nothing as I considered the conversation, I just left to find something serious to do.

**Imagine: what can a spider say to you?** For sure animals speak to us. How? It was on Monday, a solitude day at the Novitiate when I decided to spend my day walking around the woods of La Vista. As I was wandering meditatively I saw a huge spider web blocking my way. I did not want to destroy the web, so I just cut one strand of the web to make my way. Immediately I saw the entire web was loosened and lost its proper tension. I started wondering why the huge web loosened because of one single tiny string? Then something came into my mind. It was the word **CONNECT**.

This event made me wonder how the word connect is very important to every living thing of this world. I recalled my geography and cosmology classes which taught me that Mother Earth is the only planet in the solar system we know of which sustains life, and for her to sustain life it depends on being connected to other celestial bodies of the solar system such as the Sun.

We human beings result from the connection of different organs, visible and invisible. Families of every species result from the connection of other species of each kind. States and Nations result from the connection of small families of human beings. Moreover, today nations and states are talking and striving to make the world into a global village, meaning one common society. I am pretty sure this can only be achieved with a proper connection among the nations.



After realizing this great message from a small insect I felt ashamed for ignoring that person who said to me that *animals speak to us human beings*. Brothers and sisters, I am inviting you to pay close attention to animals, insects, plants, and other species which we commonly come across. They really have a great message which can impact our life, our family, our society, and even our world at large. Animals, plants, insects, and other species are part of our being, and we are one community.

**David Chisha** is an insightful young Oblate novice from Zambia who enjoys jogging, bike riding and photography.

(Continued from page one)

worst and most destructive habits toward Earth come from our constantly striving to increase our comfort and convenience and reduce our costs. He taught people songs, which were more like chants or ditties, which expressed appreciation for the simple beauty of creation. The songs were composed by a teacher that Fr. Darrell knew in Illinois.

When he spoke, Fr. Darrell often carried an inflatable Earth with him. He would lead people in a reflection about how we humans misuse Earth—through pollution, overconsumption, and development—and with each example, he would invite someone to come forward and smear the earth with a muddy paste until the ball was completely covered in slime. Then he would lead the group in another reflection on how we can live respectfully and compassionately on Earth, and as he spoke, he poured water over the ball and washed it clean.

He ended his retreats by asking parishioners to make a commitment to change: stop using plastic bags and bottles; recycle; reduce consumption of water, electricity, and meat; walk more, drive less. He formed groups within these larger communities

who would carry on promoting the messages of creation and Earth care. The group leaders would communicate with Fr. Darrell about their groups' progress.

Fr. Darrell's life shows me that it is never too late to make a change, to find a new reason to live, a new project to inspire us. His life also has taught me that appreciation of Earth is a spiritual act. Indeed, I believe it is the primordial spiritual act. It is no accident that the earliest humans declared the sun, the moon and other features of creation to be gods in their own right. Indeed, I am convinced that creation and humanity's relationship to it are at the root of all that is spiritual and holy. They are deeper than every theology, doctrine, and religion. For proof, we may refer to another great spiritual leader that we are all familiar with, who said that our guidance in life should come from the birds of the air and the lilies of the field.

**John Lasseigne** is a former Missionary Oblate. He is now an attorney in British Columbia focusing on working with immigrants.



## Program Calendar January – June, 2019

### Nature Journaling in Winter

**Sat., January 12, 1:00 – 3:00 pm**

Although the winter world may appear to be mostly asleep outside, there are some amazing things to investigate and explore. For example, did you know that snowflakes can be classified into plates, dendrites, capped columns, and more? Did you know that you can identify flowers from last summer in their leftover



winter state? "Winter flowers" often have stunning shapes and patterns.

Join us in this exploratory class as we investigate 5 Nature Journaling techniques inside that you can use to explore the winter world outside. These techniques will help you overcome a blank page and will get you started sketching, recording your thoughts, questions, observations, and more. Through Nature Journaling, you can save your treasured outdoor experiences and discoveries for years to come!

Note: Options for Nature Journaling from windows overlooking the Mississippi River Valley as well as other views will be among the possibilities to try.

**Angie Jungbluth** continues to be our valued and experienced presenter.

**Cost:** \$15.

**Registration:** Send payment to La Vista, 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035

### Film: *Normal Is Over*

**Thurs., January 17, 7:30 PM**

**Held at AMC Showplace in Edwardsville, IL**

During our long-lasting ecological crisis, occasionally it is helpful to join with others who share concerns for our sacred planet. It is good to know we are not alone in our angst

Join us to view the film *Normal Is Over*, a documentary about humanity's wisest response to climate change, species extinction, the depletion of critical natural resources, income inequality and industrial control of our food production. While this film is intended to challenge viewers on many different levels, it most of all offers hope.

**Cost:** \$12 Get tickets online:  
<https://gathr.us/screening/26942>

**Sponsored by:** Confluence Collaborative (La Vista is a member.)

### Winterfires Coffeehouse

**Sat., January 19<sup>th</sup> 7:00 – 9:00 pm**

This annual tradition is a welcome wintertime event offering camaraderie, entertainment, and good food around the fireplace in the Oblates' home. The spontaneous nature of this gathering always provides surprise and delight in human creativity. Along with your original or found poetry, stories, music and song, please bring a snack to share. We'll provide coffee, hot chocolate and tea.

**Cost:** Thanks for bringing a donation to support La Vista's programming. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

**Registration:** Email [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org) or call 618-466-5004.



### Cultural Cooking Workshop

**Healthy Food+Healthy People=Healthy Planet**

**Sat., February 16, 2:30—5:00 PM**

Are you interested in healthy food? How do we care for the planet by promoting a healthy food system? What can we learn from other cultures about healthy food choices? How do some cultures prepare a meal?

Come to experience a hands-on cultural cooking workshop. You will enjoy cooking with Dr. Sasi and learning about the Anthropology of food. Cook, taste, laugh and have fun writing simple recipes you can use at home.

**Presenter:**

Dr. Sasi Balasundaram is an anthropologist, farmer, and food and environmental justice advocate.

**Cost:** \$15

**Registration:** Send your payment to La Vista, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035, using the form on p. 5.

This program is a La Vista and SIUE Anthropology Collaboration.



## DONATION and REGISTRATION FORM

Program Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  

Street
City
State
Zip Code

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_ Donation Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: La Vista Ecological Learning Center 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035

THANK YOU for your donation which allows us to continue this newsletter, our monthly e-news and our programs. We delight in working with you for the healing of our planet and ourselves!

**Save the Date**
**Our Sacred Earth: Our Call to Action**  
**Sat., March 9**
**Held at Nerinx High School in Webster Groves, MO**

Designed for high school teachers, administrators and students, this workshop will inspire participants to take action in their schools by implementing *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' environmental message. The day includes a keynote by Ed Biersmith, Catholic Climate Covenant Ambassador, breakout sessions led by students, teachers and others, and an educational lunch session on composting. Details to come closer to the date.

Sponsored by the Ecological Consortium (La Vista is a member.)

Watch our Facebook and website pages for more information, or call 618-466-5004.

**Going Deeper into Laudato Si':**  
**Caring for our Common Home**  
**Lenten Program**  
**Wed., March 13, 20, 27, April 3, 10, 17**  
**7:00 – 8:30 pm**

Last year we engaged Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* by way of a prayer form called *Lectio Divina*, or sacred reading. This year we'll take six themes from *Laudato Si'* to pray using *Lectio Divina* as well as *Visio Divina*, sacred seeing. Each theme will be explored by way of a reading as well as a short video followed by contemplative sharing of the light within each person.

**Cost:** Donation**Registration:** Email [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org)

or call 618-466-5004

**Spring Equinox:**  
**Celebrations Around the World**  
**Saturday, March 23, 2:00 – 4:00 pm**

Cultural equinox rituals are varied and rich, and you can enter this window on the world during our annual celebration. Anthropology students from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville and their professor will be joining us to share the anthropology of equinox: celebrations of equinox around the world. Please bring a snack to share, your lawn chair and a spirit of adventure as we welcome springtime!

**Cost:** Thanks for bringing a donation to support La Vista's programming. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

**Registration:** Email [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org) or call 618-466-5004.

**Sketching and Nature Journaling**  
**Backyard Birds**  
**Sat., May 18, 10:00 am—noon**

Investigate the world of backyard birds! Drawing lessons, hints, tips, and nature journaling suggestions will get you well on your way to the enriching experience of sketching birds and recording your observations. Beginners and those who wish to broaden their drawing skills are welcome. Artistic skills are not required.

**Cost:** \$20

**Presenter:** Angie Jungbluth is a veteran science and nature journaling teacher whose enthusiasm is contagious.

**Supplies:** unlined drawing paper (in a binder or journal with space to sketch and write), pencil, eraser

**Registration:** Use the form on this page.



La Vista Ecological Learning Center  
4300 Levis Lane  
Godfrey, Illinois 62035

Let's search for a way of living  
that is characterized by

- \* right relationships,
- \* sustainability,
- \* respect for the human dignity of all,
- \* sensitivity to ecological realities  
and
- \* awareness of the sacredness of life.

Adapted from the OMI "Companion in Mission"

Visit us at [www.lavistaelc.org](http://www.lavistaelc.org)  
and on Facebook: Ecological Learning Center

---

## Summer Solstice Celebration: Make your Garden Frog-Friendly Sat., June 22, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Frogs and toads might call your backyard home if you make it welcome to them. Why bother? Amphibians are the most endangered group of vertebrate wildlife on the planet, with nearly one-third of species at risk of extinction. Learn how to maintain frog habitats in your backyard. You'll not only help them by providing a pocket of habitat, but you will also be rewarded with a frog symphony in the spring, summer and autumn months. You'll also be caring for creation!



**Presenter:** Vernon DePauw

**Cost:** Please bring a donation to support La Vista's programming. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

**Registration:** Email [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org) or call 618-466-5004.

## Sketching and Nature Journaling Flowers Sat., June 29 10:00 am—noon

Do you enjoy exploring the world of flowers and wish you could creatively record your discoveries somehow on paper? Please join us as we begin our investigation of flowers by covering a variety of techniques to creatively capture your observations on paper. This inside study will include taking a flower apart and observing all of the components of its make-up, as well as their functions. We will then go outside to observe wildflowers in nature and record our discoveries from the techniques presented inside.

Both beginners and those that want to broaden their sketching and recording skills are welcome. Artistic skills are not required.

**Supplies:** unlined drawing paper (in a binder or journal with space to sketch and write), pencil, eraser, coloring tools (colored pencils or watercolors), camp chair

**Cost:** \$20

**Registration:** Use the form on page 5 to send your payment.

**Presenter:** Angie Jungbluth, expert nature journaler and teacher.

The Oblate Ecological Initiative  
Is a ministry of the  
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

