



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 • www.lavistaelc.org

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Religion Enters the Age of Ecology

by Norman Comtois, OMI

"Fr. Norm, come and join us in a climate action march." Did you ever get such an invitation and find yourself answering "No thank you, I'm not an activist."? I am not one to consider waving banners, civil disobedience or public chanting; however, after some consideration, I signed up for the march entitled "Let My People Go."

Hence, on March 26, a few days before Easter and Passover, a crowd of faith leaders and their community members gathered on the steps of the Massachusetts State House to call upon Governor Baker to take bold leadership in addressing climate disruption. Drawing from the ancient stories of Moses confronting Pharaoh, we celebrated our shared determination as people of diverse faiths to set ourselves free from fossil fuels and to create a more just and sustainable society.

The lively outdoor service led by two rabbis and speakers representing front-line communities from all across the Commonwealth included songs and prayers, a moving litany of "climate plagues", and a public mourning. Their resistance against the installation of fracked gas pipelines was expressed through vigils, protests, and non-violent civil disobedience. After a closing blessing and song, we walked in procession to the State House, led by the drumbeats and chants of a small group of Buddhist monks.

Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas remarked to the press: "We are holding this event during a time of year that is a holy season for multiple faith traditions, because protecting our climate and God's creation is one of the most important ways to practice our faith in today's world."

Religion and Ecology

This invitation allowed me to take the next step in understanding the connection between religion, ecology, and interfaith dialogue. During the past two decades the field of Religion and Ecology has emerged within academia through the encouragement of Mary Evelyn Tucker and

John Grim, Senior Lecturers and Research Scholars from Yale University. In the past years, they have sponsored a series of conferences examining the traditions of major world religions including indigenous traditions.

Dr. Tucker reminds us that despite our differences, today we hear Mother Earth calling us to a shared future for coming generations which requires the efforts of each of us, religious and non-religious alike. Cosmology brings together religion, ecology, and justice.

In sharing my ecological concerns with leaders of other faith traditions, I realized that becoming active involved more than simply marching. It awakened a sense of inter-

relatedness, of communion. We are a group of local people, dialoguing, planning, and acting together as one community speaking our truth to power. Together we are rediscovering our role as citizens of the universe and of planet Earth, our common home.

Sacred Activism

This invitation was also the impetus I needed to see the inherent connection between action and contemplation.

Andrew Harvey rightly reminds us that, "A spirituality that is only private and self-absorbed, one devoid of an authentic political and social consciousness, does little to halt the suicidal juggernaut of history. On the other hand, an activism that is not purified by profound spiritual and psychological self-awareness and rooted in divine truth, wisdom, and compassion will only perpetuate the problem it is trying to solve, however righteous its intentions. When, however, the deepest and most grounded spiritual vision is married to a practical and pragmatic drive to transform all existing political, economic, and social institutions, a holy force – the power of wisdom and love in action – is born. This force I define as Sacred Activism." Sacred activism is the connection to the Source of Love which allows grounded activists to stay



(Continued on page 6)

Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends of La Vista,

Welcome to the summer/fall edition of La Vista Visions. In this newsletter you will read about special OMI *visions*.

In the first page article "Religion Enters the Age of Ecology", Norm Comtois, OMI, shares a growing perspective which joins two fields of study, religion and ecology. As an emerging field of study in higher education, this is such a hopeful movement. As Thomas Berry suggests, doing the "Great Work" of our time, that is, creating the conditions for the flourishing of the Earth community, requires the movement of religions into their ecological phase. The article shows how Norm is involved in this visionary movement in the Northwest.

Already in 1993 the Oblates were entering the Age of Ecology at La Vista. Twenty five years later, their prophetic vision stands as a model for today. Father Lou Studer, current OMI Provincial, was part of the decision that dedicated sixteen acres of the land at La Vista as an Illinois Nature Preserve, and he will join us for the 25th Anniversary Dedication Celebration of the "Oblates Woods Nature Preserve" on July 7th. You can read more about the Preserve and the celebration on pages 3 and 4 of this newsletter. We hope you will join us to honor the vision of the Oblates.

As Debbie Newman shares in her article on page three, forests in general in our country are in a stage of decline due to

climate change, encroachment of invasive species and development. The continued work of volunteers at La Vista to restore the Oblates Preserve to health is a very practical way to unite religion and ecology. For Oblates, the land is sacred, is "our common home" as Pope Francis names it. Tending the land becomes a holy task as well as an ecological practice.

Thanks to each of you for your part in tending our rare and precious planet and for your own unique vision.

For La Vista,
Maxine Pohlman, SSND



Nature Preserve Volunteers L-R: Bill Rathman, Mike McCarrin, Bill Zimmerman, Jim Hilgard, Debbie Newman, Sister Maxine

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

Join the Backyard Revolution! Some of the following practices go against a gardener's grain, but embracing them to the best of your ability will support pollinators and other species, creating a mutually beneficial landscape instead of one primarily beneficial to human beings and our cultural sense of beauty.

Plant natives

Native plants are being lost to habitat destruction, invasive plants and introduced pests and diseases. Careful landscaping in parks, yards and campuses can help restore this loss. Native plants are equipped to live with the local climate, soil types, and animals. Plants and animals that have evolved together depend upon each other for survival.

Learn what plants are native in your area.

There are many field guides for native trees and wildflowers that can get you started. Learn more:

www.plantnative.org

Let decaying logs lie

Birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians rely on dead trees for shelter, food, mating, resting and nesting. In addition, millipedes, beetles, spiders, worms, ants and more also call snags "home". Learn more: <http://cavityconservation.com/#>

Remove invasive species

Invasive species often invade and replace the native flora in a variety of ways and will out-compete the native species to the extent that native plants totally disappear from an area. Find out what are the invasive species in your area and remove them. The ecosystem will be healthier. Learn more: www.nature.org



Come fall, leave the leaves

Leaves are not litter; rather they are food and shelter for butterflies, beetles, bees, moths and more.

Learn more:

<https://xerces.org/2017/10/06/leave-the-leaves/>

25th Anniversary of the Missionary Oblates Woods Nature Preserve

by Debbie Scott Newman, Natural Areas Preservation Specialist

Exactly 30 years before the Missionary Oblates Woods Nature Preserve was dedicated, the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act (INAPA) passed into law. This Act created the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) and the System of preserves that the Oblates' Woods is part of. In 1963, this groundbreaking legislation produced the first legal mechanism of its kind in the U.S. to protect our precious, dwindling natural areas. George Fell, the brainchild behind the Act and the creation of the INPC, had exceptional clarity of Illinois' future with the loss of forests, prairies, and wetlands. It was his far-reaching vision—one to last long beyond his own life—from which the preserve system was conceived and ultimately executed.

Fast forward to 1993, when the Missionary Oblates decided to participate in this special system; making a commitment to protect a portion of Illinois' natural history—forever. Their vision, too, was groundbreaking. The Missionary Oblates were the first faith-based organization to protect land through the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. There are currently 577 sites permanently protected in Illinois through INPC programs. There are dozens of different types of owners of protected lands: state and local government, non-profit groups, private landowners, corporations, academic institutions, park districts, cemetery associations and others. But the Oblates remain the only religious institution on this diverse and prestigious list.

But while the creation of INPC and the dedication years later of the Missionary Oblates' Woods NP were both visionary and groundbreaking, I wonder if the creators and decision-makers could have completely known how truly critical these efforts were? *Now, more than ever*, we need our natural areas. Bats, birds, bees, and big oaks are on the decline. Our atmosphere is being loaded with CO₂, and our waters are filling with plastic. In this 21st Century, diverse, healthy natural habitats provide critical buffer against the loss of biodiversity, remove CO₂, and keep our physical environment cleaner. Forests in particular, such as the upland oak Missionary Oblates' Woods, are critical to healthy watersheds, for absorbing carbon dioxide, and for providing the habitat for myriad Illinois creatures.

But natural lands continue to disappear at an alarming rate. We have lost many tens of thousands of acres of natural lands since the passage of the INAPA in 1963. Can anyone imagine what our state would look like if we



didn't have the Act all these decades? Without the option for permanent and legal protection of these important natural areas many more would've been destroyed in the last 55 years. And to put it in perspective, most of today's prairies and forests have existed since the end of the last Ice Age, 8000+ years ago. Yet they can be wiped out in one day with a bulldozer.

Today, the Missionary Oblates Woods Nature Preserve, along with the land the Oblates protected in the Forest Legacy program, are essential segments of a large block of contiguous habitat stretching along the Mississippi River bluffs. This land is prime real estate that could have made a few wealthy people quite happy with a river view home. But instead of a temporary pay-off for a few, generations of humans will be able to enjoy not only the view, but the benefits of cleaner water, more habitat for bald eagles, wildflowers, butterflies and bees, and buffer against climate change.

Illinois Nature Preserves Commission staff often use the Oblates as a model example of faith-based conservation in action. The INPC is deeply grateful to the Missionary Oblates for putting their heart and their actions into helping our planet.

Program Calendar June – December, 2018

Nature Journaling through the Seasons
(Continued) June 9, 9:00 – 11:00 am Sept.
15, 9:00 – 11:00 am Jan. 12, 2019 1 - 3:00 pm



The spring session of this class was full of inspiration and great techniques! Please join us for this summer class and discover more options for creating a unique nature journal. After an intro-

duction indoors, we'll be out on the land, enjoying the plants, insects, birds, and trees at a deep and rich level as we learn how to record our outdoor discoveries through Nature Journaling. All skill levels are welcome, and artistic talent is not required.

Angie Jungbluth, is a veteran science teacher, has done programs for the Missouri Department of Conservation for many years, is a Volunteer Master Naturalist, and is a signature member of the St. Louis Watercolor Society. She is an experienced nature journaling teacher and considers it a favorite pastime.

Cost: \$15 per session

Registration: Use the form on page five and send your payment to La Vista, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035

Materials: Upon registration, you will receive a materials list via e-mail.

**Summer Solstice
and Native Pollinator Celebration**
Saturday, June 23, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

The work of pollinators defines our seasons: the bloom of spring wildflowers, summer berry picking, apple harvesting in autumn. Bees are the most important pollinator and are seriously affected by the loss of nesting sites. Vernon De-Pauw, wood carver and wood worker, will lead us in making bee nesting structures to take home and install in our back yards. A limited number of bee premade pollinator houses will be available for you to purchase, decorate, and take home. Please bring a snack to share, and enjoy this opportunity to make richer connections with the insect world.

Cost: Donations to support our programming are welcome.

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 or e-mail us info@lavistaelc.org.

**25th Anniversary Dedication Celebration of the
Missionary Oblates Woods Nature Preserve**
Saturday, July 7 1:00 – 3:00 pm



Join us on July 7th to celebrate this anniversary and learn about the importance of preserving forests everywhere. Speakers will include Father Lou Studer, OMI, Oblate Provincial Leader, Father Jack Lau, OMI, and representatives of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. We'll have refreshments and an optional hike in the Preserve to take in the beauty and see the work of our faithful volunteers.

Cost: none

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 or e-mail us info@lavistaelc.org.

MOTHS – Nighttime Adventure at La Vista
Saturday, July 21 7:30 - 9:30 pm

National Moth Week celebrates the beauty, life cycles, and habitats of moths which are among the most diverse and successful organisms on Earth. We'll get informed via video, then move outside to the patio to enjoy refreshments and observe moths attracted by a special light and a unique "moth brew". Learn several ways you can help our nighttime wildlife that are affected by our changing environment!

Cost: Donations to support our programming are always welcome.

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 or email info@lavistaelc.org.



Registration Form/Donation Form

Name of Program _____

Name _____ Phone _____

Address: _____

Street

City

State

Zip Code

Amount Enclosed: _____

Email Address: _____

Registration confirmation will be sent via e-mail.

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

DISCUSSION COURSE - A World of Health: Connecting People, Place, and Planet

**Monthly on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays: 9/4, 9/18,
10/2, 10/16, 11/6, 11/20 7:00 – 8:30 pm**

A healthy environment is essential for human health and well-being. *A World of Health* is a discussion course helping you explore the connections between the health of our communities and the health of our planet. You will also learn about the limitations of the current medical model and the places where our personal health intersects with the environment—from our food and homes, to our communities and society. Together, we'll discover actions that promote good health and in turn, promote a healthier environment.

Cost: \$30 (Includes cost of book.)

Registration: Use the form on page 5 **or** call 618-466-5004 by August 28. **Note:** Payment refunded if six person minimum is not met.

Celebration of the Autumnal Equinox and La Vista's Majestic Oak Trees September 22 2:00 – 4:00 pm

What speaks of autumn better than a gorgeous golden oak tree? During this celebration we'll honor the oak as a "keystone" species and Illinois' state tree. Living hundreds of years, they are our connection to the past and promise for the future. We can return their generosity with our own efforts to protect them. Join us as we tag our oak trees at La Vista and discover how to care for them.

Please bring an autumn snack to share.

No cost, and donations are always welcome.

Registration: Call 618-466-5004
or info@lavistaelc.org.

In Pursuit of Silence:

An Afternoon of Contemplation

Saturday, November 3 1:00- 4:30 pm

Our afternoon will begin with viewing *In Pursuit of Silence*, a meditative exploration of silence and the impact of noise on our lives. The film takes us on a journey around the globe and inspires us to both experience silence and celebrate the wonders of our world.

Afterward, we will have time on the land to enjoy autumn and the quieting of nature when crickets cease calling, leaves gently fall to the ground, and growth time slows. Bring your nature journal, lawn chair if you wish, and water bottle. We'll re-gather at 4:00 to conclude together and share refreshments.

Cost: Donations welcome.

Registration: Use the form on this page and send your donation to La Vista, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035. Please include your e-mail address for registration confirmation.



Winter Solstice Celebration and Cosmic Advent Wreath Lighting Saturday, December 22, 7:00 -9:00 pm

Cost: Donations welcome.

Registration: info@lavistaelc.org or 618-466-5004

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



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

Read
this issue of
La Vista Visions
as well as the
archived newsletters
on our web site:
www.lavistaelc.org

THANKS FOR SHARING.

(Continued from page 1)

engaged for the long haul without burning out.

Creation Care and Interfaith Dialogue

Finally, my newly raised consciousness led me to accept an invitation to participate in a two day Peace Conference entitled "Creation Care and Interfaith Dialogue" to be held at Rolling Ridge Conference Center in North Andover, MA. My role will be to represent the Christian perspective on the care of planet Earth, our common home. The format will be a panel discussion including a presentation from each of the three Abrahamic faith traditions and an afternoon workshop on the spirituality of St Francis and the message of Laudato Si.

Oblate Ecological Initiative

I am most grateful for my association with the Oblate Ecological Initiative, especially La Vista Ecological Learning Center, with its invitation to come and broaden my vision. This vision was well articulated in a recent Oblate Conference reminding us that the cry of Earth is the cry of the poor. In both 1997 and 2016 this priority on behalf of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation was expressed as an integral part of evangelization for Oblates throughout the world.

Anyone interested in pursuing the Christian connection to the ecological issues and the fate of Earth, our common home, can find abundant resources on the following web-sites:

Green Faith: Interfaith Partners for the Environment

<http://www.greenfaith.org/>

Abbey of the Arts <https://abbeyofthearts.com/>

The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale

<http://fore.yale.edu/>

Oblate Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation

<http://www.omiusa.org/ipic/>

Heartbeat: John Phillip Newell

<http://heartbeatjourney.org/>

Catholic Climate Covenant [http://](http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/)

<http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>



Norman Comtois, OMI, has been La Vista's consultant, collaborator, and team member for many years. His experience in Pastoral Counseling, Intentional Eucharistic Communities and Renewal programs for women religious continue to inform his ministry as a current retreat director. Norman encourages those attending his

presentations and retreats to ponder the wisdom of their religious traditions in the context of the Story of the Universe. Learn more on La Vista's web site: <https://www.lavistaelc.org/northeast-region>.
