



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

618.455.5084 • 4300 Lewis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035 • lange@omilusa.org

Autumn 2004
Volume 3, Issue 3

Strange Harvest by Maurice Lange, OMI

The phone rang during breakfast: “Father, we need you to come. There was an accident last night and three of the Mexicans were killed”. I was being asked to go to the nearby county where peach and apple orchards predominate. People from Mexico come here each summer to work with the pruning and harvesting. I was being asked because no one in the church of that county can speak Spanish. The request was for me to give some sort of consolation to the family and friends of the deceased (a challenging pastoral task in any language).

A gray, dreary day was my companion while driving the back, country roads trying to find the living quarters of the migrant workers. Finally locating the spot, I encountered several groups of grieving Mexican men. I was introduced to two brothers from Chiapas, Mexico who had lost two of

their brothers in the accident. I did the best I could to attend to their grief. There was a request for a memorial Mass the following day. (I also noticed the house where these folks were living for three months a year: how clean and new it was.)

The next day I drove to the church a few miles from where the migrants were staying. At the memorial Mass there were surprisingly as many Anglos as Hispanics in attendance. These included the owners of the orchard who employed the deceased workers. As we were all visiting outside after Mass, there was a request that we drive to the place of the accident to bless that spot.

As we traveled the steep, twisting back roads of that county I was struck by the incongruity of the beauty of

the rural setting and the sad occasion of our reason for gathering. Many of the grieving were waiting for us when we arrived. As we walked off the road and into a field, I noticed small pieces of the wrecked automobile left behind at the scene of the accident. It was there after the blessing that the two surviving brothers broke down. There, where their two brothers lost their lives, was much expression of grief and sorrow. And in the midst of that pain, it hit me.

The **whole thing** did not make sense! Why did these young men have to live for three months a year, and ultimately die, so far away from home? What kind of an economic system forces them to travel annually from the beautiful southern-most state of Chiapas, Mexico all the way here to the Midwest? Where no one speaks their language! Where the customs and the food

are both strange! I am sure these folks would rather remain with their families...this does not make sense!

Didn't years ago our own young people do this kind of farm work? Why don't they do it now? If our young people do work now, where are they employed? Many work in “fast-food” places! And that's another part of the puzzle of this strange harvest...these restaurants are a big part of the “food” industry that is in need of reform. Have you ever looked into the eyes of a young person working across the counter in a fast-food place? These eyes are hardly full of zest and life! Instead, they are typically dulled by a mechanistic paradigm whose supposed output is nourishment.

(continued on pg 6)



Letter from the Director

Autumn Equinox, 2004

Welcome again to *La Vista Visions*! As the days continue to shorten and grow cooler we recognize the change of seasons. While Earth provides us in the Northern Hemisphere with harvests at this time, may we reciprocate with generosity, mutuality and abundance.

In this Autumn issue we are blessed with an article by my friend Darrell Rupiper, OMI. Darrell looks deep into his life and sees the seeds of an ecological vocation sprouting over time and currently bearing much fruit. I would encourage you to be in contact with Darrell regarding his ministry of preaching. He has already brought several parish communities to deepened awareness of their Christian calling to recognize their place in the natural world. Darrell is also a wonderful motivator

of practical action on behalf of justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

In addition to this quarterly newsletter, the **La Vista Ecological Learning Center** has been active in a variety of ways. Many groups have been asking for programs and input from this ministry. These include the Oblate

novices, Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, Leadership Conference of Women Religious, Sisters of Earth, Houston Incarnate Word Sisters, Oblate School of Theology's *Ministry to Ministers*, Adorers of the Blood of Christ, Diocese of Springfield, Sisters of Divine Providence and Oblate House of Theology.

The **Community Supported Garden at La Vista** is into the final two months of its second successful season. Ninety-seven families have had a direct conscious link to Earth by being nourished from this land. The weather has been more challenging than last season and yet our Farmer Amy Cloud and her assistants Tiffany Jones and Chris Ricci have worked diligently to provide abundant harvests of organic vegetables, herbs and flowers.

We continually strive to evoke a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. May your efforts be blessed and your harvests be meaningful for the whole community of life.

At press time (early August) I recognize that a couple of events will occur in the next several months that "define us as a people". One being three years since the September 11 attacks and the other is our National elections on November 2. May we approach these events with all appropriate solemnity and seriousness. Can we also, at this time, not lose sight of what ultimately defines us as people, as humans: that we can not exist without the natural world?

- **Maurice Lange, OMI**



Sharing a healthy harvest at the Autumnal Equinox.

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

Resources for "Just" Food

Books:

- *"Hope's Edge; The Next Diet for a Small Planet"* Frances Moore Lappe and Anna Lappe. 2002.
- *"Fast Food Nation; The Dark Side of the All-American Meal"* Eric Schlosser. 2001.

Videos:

- *"The Global Banquet: Politics of Food"* Maryknoll World Productions. www.maryknollworld.org
- *"Diet For A New America"* KCET Video. 1-800-343-4727

Websites for Eating Locally-grown Food

- Local Harvest. www.localharvest.org
- Robin Van En Center - Center for CSA resources. www.csacenter.org

Pastoral Statement:

- *"For I Was Hungry & You Gave Me Food - Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers"* United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. 2003. 1-800-235-8722



Earth Literacy Week 2004

“Exploring the Sacred Universe” on Scenic Bluffs overlooking the mile-wide Mississippi River

Twenty-eight people gathered this past August 3-10 for the annual Earth Literacy course held at the *La Vista Ecological Learning Center*. Participants and staff alike came to these bluffs from all over the country to explore the integrity of Creation. With the 13.7 billion year Story of the Universe as our backdrop, we delved into the stories of the galaxies, stars, our solar system, planet Earth, the human story and the story of our particular regions of life.



Perceptions that fashion our cultural worldview were critically examined and practical skills were developed to create a more ecologically-conscious life style. Participants included teachers, religious women, those in leadership and formators. Our geological field trip up the Mississippi River road took us billions of years back in time. All of the vegetarian meals were celebrations as early August is the peak of tomato and peach harvests in this part of the Midwest. Consider joining us next summer as we gather for *Exploring the Sacred Universe*, August 3-10, 2005!

Emergence of an Ecological Vocation (seventh in series)

by Darrell Rupiper, OMI

Apparently I had been sitting right on the edge of the Grand Canyon for quite some time, entranced and completely absorbed by its beauty. My Swiss friends with whom I was vacationing later told me that they stood at a distance fearing that any distraction might send me to the bottom of that canyon! They waited uneasily.

Moments of being entranced are so precious and often too rare. We have all experienced those surprise moments when the stage is unexpectedly set and the curtain pulled back just far enough that we are taken in (absorbed) or given a peek, however fleetingly, of nature's blazing numinosity. At those moments we simply experience our ONENESS with all that IS.

As a child, I didn't make a connection between any of my 'wow' experiences and God. But, in retrospect, I am sure that God smiled when the aroma wafting from two peony bushes on either side of our farmhouse sidewalk was so sweet and strong that the little five year old barefoot boy who was racing past, stopped, went back and sunk his nose into the huge white and pink blossoms and breathed deeply.

Or when that same child watched curiously as a mother pig meticulously prepared a birthing place by

digging into the earth with her snout, carving out a bed for herself and her offspring. I'm also sure that God's smile broadened as the child's eyes got larger as one, then two, three, up to a dozen piglets entered the light of day and with their eyes still closed began groping their way clumsily but instinctively toward their mothers' teats already oozing with nourishment. God saw again, this time with the little boy, that it was good!

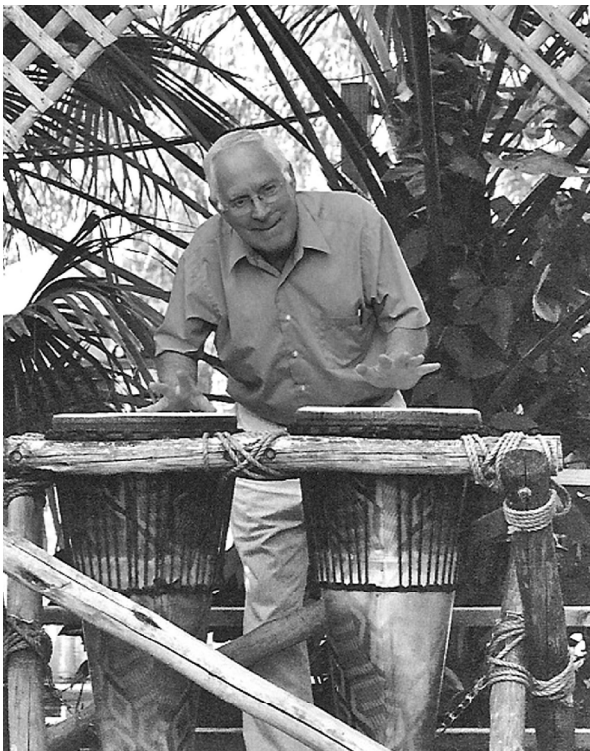
I recall loving to go outside early in the morning to open the chicken house doors, standing back and watching the chickens come flying out. They loved to be outside and to scratch in the dirt. (No more. The pigs and chickens of today's factory farms spend their entire lives deprived of ever touching ground. A nasty and cruel situation which is called 'development'. And God is saddened.)

I do believe that God shared in the mischievous pleasure of this writer when as a kid I could not resist hurling an object into the leafy dormitory where hundreds of sparrows were noisily sharing their experiences of the day before going to sleep. In an instant a cloud of feathered-family would cannon-like shoot out of the other side of the tree, take their place on a not-too-distant electrical wire and wait silently until the little nuisance disappeared. It became a seasonal, almost daily ritual.

As children, my seven siblings, mom, dad and myself were embedded in nature, all the while totally unaware of how deeply entwined we were within life's complex and beautifully woven web. Milking the cows, gathering the eggs, hauling manure, feeding the pigs, chickens, cows and calves, hanging laundry, gardening, etc. were all chores in which each participated fully.

The invitation I received to write this piece on the emergence of my ecological vocation triggers memories of the sweet scent of newly plowed black Iowa soil. I have fond memories of once having shut off the tractor while cultivating corn near a little stream that ran through our farm, jumping down and shirtless throwing myself flat on my back wiggling myself into the coolness of the recently turned fragrant earth while staring skyward at the white puffs moving across their beautiful blue background all the while being fully aware of a red-winged blackbird responding loudly to my presence as it clung sideways to a nearby swaying reed.

People who know me know that my time later in life in



Darrell drumming life into his Ecological Vocation.

Brazil was a life-changer. Nothing could have prepared this Iowa farm boy for the shock of the human misery I encountered or the resulting pathos that surged within me. Newly ordained, fire in my belly and inspired by words such as these from our founder: “*Leave nothing undared!*” “*Don’t count the costs or calculate the risks!*”, I took my stand firmly on the side of God’s little ones. In a relatively short time (four and a half years) my associate and I were arrested, imprisoned and heard the nonstop screams of people being tortured. We were then expelled from Brazil accompanied by one of the torturers who bragged about having received his training in torture methods at the International Police Academy in Washington, D.C.

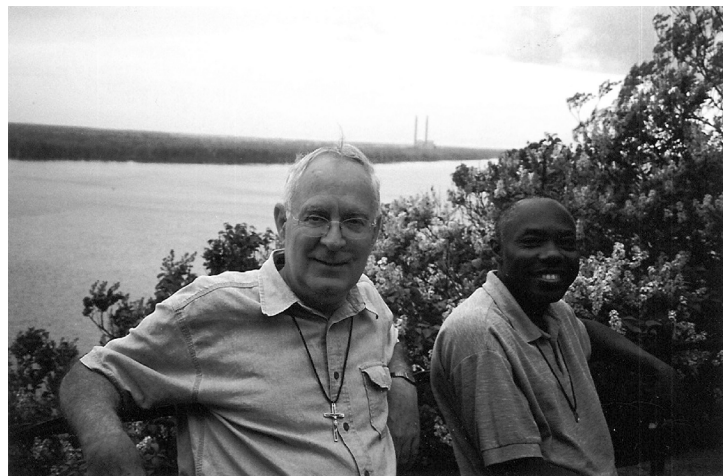
On the trip back to the States I promised God I would never forget what I had seen and heard among the little ones. Subsequently my empathy for the suffering of the human species led to my deep involvement with the homeless, opposition to the nuclear arms race resulting in a number of arrests, three short prison terms, two trips to Iran during the hostage crisis, etc.

More traditional forms of ministry have also been part of my life but always energized by the ‘dangerous memories’ of my Brazilian experience.

A dramatic shift was birthed in me during a two hour visit with Thomas Berry, C.P. when, with carefully chosen words, he said that the pathos and energy evoked in response to the suffering of humanity is the biggest obstacle to the remedying of an even more serious problem, namely, *the destruction of our home, planet Earth*. Whoa! He was saying that if a ship is sinking, the ship must be our immediate and primary concern. Yes, some passengers are sick, others hungry, homeless etc. however, the well-being of all living and future living beings is entirely dependent on the well-being of the ship.

It was Marshall McLuhan who said there are no passengers on this ship—all are crew members. All hands on deck! Many good people are doing many good things while the ship continues to sink. I believe that it is the moral responsibility of every person to put defense of our spaceship Earth (nature) at the center of one’s focus and efforts. Berry said, “**The impending death of half the living species on Earth is looked upon with casual indifference!**” He also said that we must move from a spirituality concerned with justice merely for humans to a spirituality of justice for the devastated Earth community. His words hit home.

Touched deeply by what Berry shared I set out to be



Darrell, novice Quilin Bouzi and “La Vista”

awakened (to fall in love with) the miracles, magnificence and mysteries of which I am a part, all of which is a manifestation of the One I call God. The everydayness of life; the deception that poisons values in a culture dominated by consumerism; my attention and energies being focused almost exclusively on human suffering are some of the factors that all but dulled my capacity to be astonished....had in a sense anaesthetized me. Each contributing to my feelings of being ‘as if’ autistic, bound up Lazarus-like, alienated from all that evokes a sense of awe, wonder and amazement.

At times I have the frustrating and overwhelming experience of being a stranger in paradise. A strong “YES” to Loren Eiseley who said: “If one’s life had not been spent in the midst of it...we would be astonished..it would astound us!”

In the midst of this enlarged perspective I have been assigned to a new ministry. This involves my inviting others to COME HOME to Earth. As this ministry takes me on the road for weeks at a time it is good for me to ‘come home’ to myself and reflect on my ‘emerging ecological vocation’. I know that I can not have an adequate sense of myself without a sense of a deep relationship with my mother, the Earth. My newly found vocation has sparked new life, energy and excitement within me. I was filled with amazement when, for example, I learned that in the human being the Universe becomes conscious of itself.

Our common ecological vocation is challenging, life-long, meaningful and filled with ‘wows!’ waiting to be discovered... while the Gift-giver smiles that smile that says: ‘It is good...and mighty important.’

Darrell can be reached at drupiper2000@hotmail.com



"Food reveals our connection to the Earth. Each bite contains the life of the Sun and the Earth. We can see and taste the whole Universe in a piece of bread! Contemplating our food for a few seconds before eating, in mindfulness, can bring us much happiness. Mindful eating can cultivate seeds of compassion and understanding."

- - Thich Nhat Hanh

(Strange Harvest, continued from pg 1)

Much of our entire food system does not make ecological sense and is not sustainable. When our corporations dump cheap American grain into the Mexican economy, small Mexican corn growers can not compete. They are forced to uproot from their families, traditions and beautiful southern and central Mexican landscapes and many move to work in *maquiladoras* in border cities like Tijuana and Nuevo Laredo. These places look nothing like their homeland. There they enter the mechanistic world of manufacturing televisions or washing machines.

Customs and rituals that endured for thousands of years and gave deep meaning to life guided these people in the land of their birth. What customs and rituals will come from working in far-away factories, fields and sweatshops?

Strange harvest indeed! And ultimately one that does not nourish. Let us reflect upon the true cost of what is in our cornucopias this Autumn. And let us support alternatives that promote fair trade, just wages and incentives to promote ecological farming as a vocation for young people. ☺

How Can I Participate?

All people seeking a mutually enhancing relationship with Earth are welcome to participate in the scheduled programs and the Community Supported Garden of the Oblate Ecological Initiative. Just call or write for more information and/or to register.

Due to the wonderful response, the CSG is full for this year. We are putting those interested in becoming shareholders on a priority list for 2005. Volunteer opportunities definitely exist for different tasks in this office as well as in the garden.

Fr. Maurice Lange, OMI is available for presentations and retreats at other locations. Contact him with your request.

We do ask that guests and shareholders respect this site and its primary function as a novitiate. Visits to the office and garden are made by appointment. Please call Fr. Maurice for directions at 618-466-5004.

Visit us on the web at www.lavistacsa.org.

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