



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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Laudato Si'* and Turning *Isms* Into *Wasms

by **Maxine Pohlman, SSND**

When Satish Kumar, ecologist, author, and educator, visited La Vista, he spoke passionately as he called us to a reverential ecology rather than a selfish one, reminding us that our concern for creation is not just so humans can survive; it is because all life is sacred. In his unique style he also shared many verbal gems during his presentations. He spoke them with a twinkle in his eye and a wonderful sense of humor; yet, anyone truly listening could tell they carried serious meanings. Among the many I treasure is, "All *isms* should become *wasms*." In using this clever phrase, I heard him saying that ecologically destructive theories and practices have to go. I admired Satish for his upbeat attitude while addressing serious problems on our planet, and I wondered if his ability to remain youthful and strong throughout his long life as an ecologist was due to his mental climate and the ability to change his own *isms* to *wasms*.

Kumar's quote came to mind this past October when I participated in study sessions on the papal encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. I couldn't help but notice the many *isms* the Pope addressed as he called for human beings to change. I admit struggling to understand some of these, and I relished the opportunity to study them, for they are so vital to understanding the deep meaning of this encyclical and the causes of the ecological crisis. In this article I invite you to consider three of them, the mental climate they engender, and healthy, holy alternatives.

Anthropocentrism and Relativism

In Chapter Three, "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis," the Pope mentions two that I feel are very important – anthropocentrism and relativism. Anthropocentrism is a point of view that considers human beings as the most significant element of existence, especially as opposed to other-than-human beings. *Laudato Si'* says that someone with an anthropocentric view "sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of

facts, as a mere 'given,' as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere 'space' into which objects can be thrown away with complete indifference."

When I hold human beings as the absolute center, then my ethical choices come out of this anthropocentric frame of reference, resulting in relativism. *Laudato Si'* describes relativism as seeing "everything as irrelevant unless it serves

one's own immediate interests." This perspective allows humans the freedom to take advantage of another, considering others as mere objects. Someone with this point of view will deem the negative impact of choices on society and nature merely as collateral damage. For example, mountain top removal to extract coal, resulting in burying and poisoning streams is acceptable from this point of view.

As I deepened my understanding of these two *isms* and their powerful impact on the whole Earth community, I realized that changing from anthropocentrism and relativism is a mighty challenge. Instead of objectifying other species, I am called to feel united with all that exists. Rather than believing only human beings are held in God's embrace, I will recognize that all creatures have intrinsic value in God's eyes. In fact, I will so identify with other beings that I will feel, "the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement."

What a powerful description of the kind of change that is needed in my own mental climate!

More than three decades ago, Thomas Berry, CP, geologist and cultural historian, articulated similar sentiments as those expressed in the encyclical. He wrote, "The universe is composed of subjects to be communed with, not objects to be exploited. Everything has its own voice. Thunder and lightning and stars and planets, flowers, birds, animals, trees, ~ all these have voices, and they constitute a community of existence that is profoundly related." It seems that the time is ripe for changing *isms* into *wasms*.

(Continued on page 6)



Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends of La Vista,

It is January, a precious month to ponder the past year and plan for 2017. What are your hopes and dreams for yourself, your family, our country and our planet?

My hope is that the articles and programs offered in this issue of *La Vista Visions* may be a catalyst as you look to realize your dreams for the new year. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis says, "Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal." (Par. 202)

In the article on page one, I selected guiding ideas from the encyclical to direct us on that long path of renewal. Along with Pope Francis, I believe that at its heart, the ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis, calling us to a change of heart and mind.

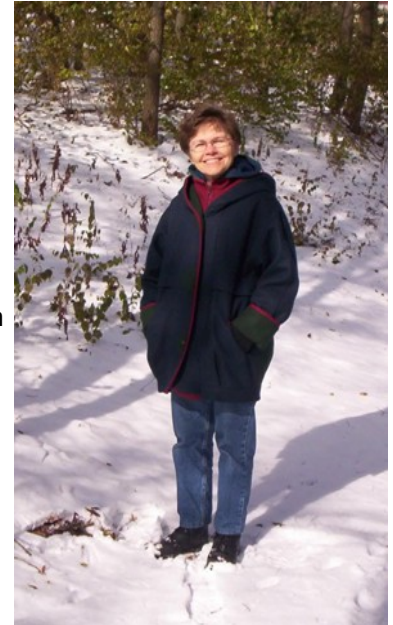
One very specific trend that could affect significant change for people and planet is the emergence of green or natural options when it comes time to plan a funeral. This sacred life transition has been co-opted by the funeral industry, making families bystanders when they

could be intimately involved in the burial of a loved one. On page three you can read how Sister Anita Cleary, OP, brings her artistic talent as a weaver to the green burial option in a very special way. I'm grateful for her witness to this manner of caring for people and for our common home.

Finally, I invite you to come to our programs, especially our new endeavor taking place on Earth Day. Ellie Stock, retired Presbyterian minister, will lead participants in a morning of reflection and prayer on the land at La Vista. Ellie brings a lifetime of social and environmental justice efforts with her.

And, as always, deep gratitude to you for joining us in caring for our rare and precious planet.

For La Vista,
Maxine Pohlman, SSND



Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human Earth Relationship

CONVENTIONAL BURIAL FACTS -

Why we need a natural alternative

A staggering amount of resources are buried annually in the U.S. through the process of conventional burial including:

- * 30 million board feet of hardwoods, including tropical hardwoods
- * 2,700 tons of copper and bronze in caskets
- * 104,000 tons of steel in caskets and vaults
- * 1.6 million tons of reinforced concrete in vaults
- * 827,000 gallons of toxic embalming fluid

Cremation is not truly a "green" alternative to traditional burial. The amount of energy needed to reduce a body to ashes is extensive. Toxins from the cremation process emitted into the environment include: dioxin, mercury, sulfur dioxide, carbon dioxide, hydrochloric acid and hydrofluoric acid.

Casket manufacturers are consistently on the EPA's list of each state's top 50 hazardous waste producers due to the toxic chemicals emitted from the finishes applied to metal caskets.

According to the U.S. Center for Disease control, embalming provides no public health benefit. In fact, the chemicals used in embalming are highly toxic. OSHA requires embalmers to suit up in full-body coverings complete with respirators while embalming.

Taken from Bellefontaine Cemetery Green Burial Brochure (www.bellefontainecemetery.org)

Woven with Care, Woven with Prayer – Creating Shrouds for Green Burials

by Anita Cleary, O.P.

Several years ago Sharon Zayac, O.P., began the research of green burials and the possibilities for this option in Central Illinois. Intrigued, I joined in on the study with a special interest in discovering the various types of shrouds available. Here I will share with you some of our findings and why I began to weave shrouds for green burials.

Green burials do indeed offer a viable alternative to traditional burial practices in the U.S. Totally natural, green burials are Earth-friendly alternatives to cremation, which require significant outlays of fossil-fuel energy. Still practiced around the world, and in the United States until the last several centuries, green burials allow the body and burial shroud or casket to return entirely to the soil from which they originated. Green burials offer the option of wrapping the body in a burial shroud or placing it in an entirely biodegradable casket made of wicker, bamboo, or other totally natural materials. With minimal environmental impact, a green burial offers a simple, natural transition to completing the cycle of life and death.

Green burial shrouds are woven from all natural fibers: cotton, linen, silk, jute. Synthetic threads are not permissible because they do not decompose and return to the soil. There are various designs for tying the shroud closed. A board is placed with the body for ease in carrying and strong, natural cords which are hand knit or woven are utilized to carefully lay the body into the ground. The wood and carrying cords remain with the body.

When we visited an area funeral home to learn more about green burials, we were shown two options for burial shrouds. One was an orange silk and the other was the color and weave of

muslin that appeared to be simply cut from a bolt of cloth. Neither were options that I wanted for myself. I had not been weaving too long at that point in time. However, I knew that I could create something simple and beautiful that could be appreciated as an art piece until it was needed for burial or could be purchased at the time of need.

I began weaving on both a floor loom and a table top loom using different mixtures of natural cottons and linens. I asked different funeral directors what would make things easier for them in using the shrouds. I adapted the styles, ties and carrying cords for strength while maintaining the softness and beauty of the finished product. All of our shrouds are “Woven with Care, Woven with Prayer.”



S. Anita displays a handwoven shroud

Dominican Sister Sharon Zayac, O.P. is the director of Jubilee Farm, a center for ecology and spirituality just west of Springfield, Illinois, and Sister Anita Cleary, O.P., ministers with her there as a fiber artist and retreat / spiritual director. For further information about the farm and about purchasing shrouds, you may reach them at jubilee.farm@comcast.net.

Program Calendar January - June, 2017

Winterfires Coffeehouse - Brewing Hope Saturday, January 21, 7:00 - 9:00 pm

*'Hope' is the thing with feathers -
that perches in the soul -
and sings the tune without the words -
and never stops - at all -*

- Emily Dickinson

Join us around the warmth of the fireplace in the Oblates' home and nurture hope in your soul as the depths of wintertime call us to this annual evening of inspiring poetry, camaraderie, tasty treats, coffee and Mexican hot chocolate. Please bring original or found poetry, story, jokes, music, and a snack/ dessert to share. Optional donations gratefully accepted. It's time to have some fun!

Registration: 618-466-5004 or info@lavistaelc.org.
Include your name and the number attending.

Authentic Indian Cuisine Cooking Class Saturday, March 4 10:30 am – 12:30 pm

Our first cooking class with Anu in October was a great success! Participants learned how to use spices and how to create delicious Indian fare. Anu is returning to teach us three new Indian dishes. Join us as we cook and eat a great lunch together!

Cost: \$15.

Registration: Use the form on page 5 and send your payment to La Vista, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035 by Feb. 27

Spring Equinox Celebration Saturday, March 18, 2:00 - 4:00 pm

Join us as we celebrate the beginning of springtime with Judy Williamson, Spiritual Programs Coordinator at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows. Judy will lead us in a meditative drawing/coloring technique using recycled paper. This is an experience everyone can enjoy, not only artists. We'll also have our ritual "turning of the sun staff" followed by refreshments. Please bring a springtime treat to share.

Registration: 618-466-5004 or info@lavistaelc.org.
Please include your name and the number attending. Optional donations gratefully accepted.

Begin your Earth Day Celebration with our TREE OF LIFE mini RETREAT Saturday, April 22, 9:15 registration; 9:30 am – 12:30 pm retreat



You are invited to participate in a time of reflection focused on THE TREE OF LIFE, of which we all are a part. We will reflect on its/our evolving individuality, diversity/complexity and communion and what happens when we either honor or dishonor this movement. How do we live consciously and move into this Way of knowing, doing and being as nature teaches us?

This mini retreat will include a presentation, times of individual and group work, singing, meditation and prayer, and of course, refreshments.

Come, enjoy a spirit-filled time, as we celebrate Earth Day together.

Presenter: Ellie Stock, retired Presbyterian (USA) clergy, presently engaged in environmental ministry through the Second Presbyterian Church and the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy's Earth Care Congregations Program, the Ferguson Eco Team, and the Joining Hands Peru Partnership.

Place: La Vista Ecological Learning Center
Cost : \$10.

Registration: Requested by Monday, April 24th.
Use the form on page 5 and send your payment to La Vista, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035.
Please make check payable to La Vista.

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.

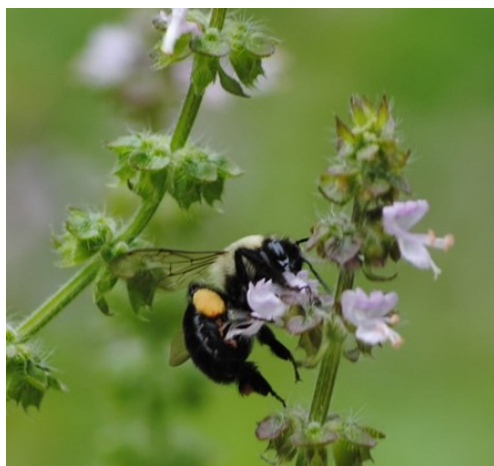
Mail to: La Vista Ecological Learning Center 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035



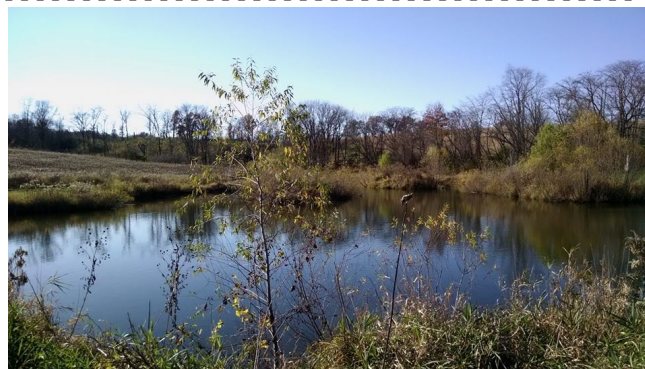
Summer Solstice and a Celebration of Bees Saturday, June 24, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Celebrate the beginning of the summer season and enjoy Pat and Jerry Veicht's passion for bees and honey. They started one apiary with 2 hives in 2012 and now have multiple hives in nine apiaries, including La Vista where they have 36 hives! Aware of the crisis among bee colonies, Pat and Jerry appreciate any opportunity to teach how we can aid all species of bees. Come to La Vista and celebrate summer, bees, and the abundance of life on our special planet.

Registration: 618-466-5004 or info@lavistaelc.org
Optional donations gratefully accepted.
Please bring a summertime snack or drink to share.



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



Retreating into the Universe Story and Laudato Si June 16 - June 22; Fri, 5 pm –Thurs, 10 am (after brunch)

Pope Francis in his encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home* has called each of us to become more mindful of our relationship with Earth. Using this and other resources, plus quiet time in the prairie beauty, we will explore more deeply how the Universe Story is the foundation for an awakening consciousness of Earth as a primary revelation of the Divine.

We'll look at basic principles and characteristics that will guide us to a holistic and feminine relationship with the whole Earth community. The goal of this retreat is to move us into contemplation and action in our care for our common home. (Limited to 12 participants)

Fee: \$500

Place: Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat

2664 145th Avenue Wheatland, IA

SSND Presenters: Kathleen Mary Kiemen,
Maxine Pohlman, and Paulette Zimmerman

Registration: 563-336-8414 Visit: www.chmiowa.org



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

*Let us sing
as we go.*

May our struggles
and our concern
for this planet
never take away
***the joy of our
hope.***

- Laudato Si'

(Continued from page 1)

Consumerism

Both Pope Francis and Thomas Berry call us to reconsider another *ism*, consumerism. When it takes hold of people, they get caught up in needless buying and spending, consuming more than is really necessary. This mindset promotes and protects the interests of consumers, creating behaviors that are detrimental to life on our planet. In the chapter "*What Is Happening to Our Common Home*," the encyclical names consumerism as one cause of pollution and climate change since it is "bereft of social or ecological awareness, resulting in making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly."

When consumerism is replaced, a beautiful perspective emerges, creating a mental climate convinced that everything in the world is connected. It sees that the way natural ecosystems work is the model for the way we need to function. Instead of a throwaway system, it promotes the adoption of "a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them." This alternative to consumerism embraces the setting of limits and self-restraint.

With equally convincing words and poetic phrasing, Thomas

Berry describes what happens when we let consumerism hold sway in our minds and in our actions: "Our inner being will die if we continue to transform natural beauty into the soul-deadening, concrete-laden, box-store landscapes of a consumer society. Our quest for wonderworld is creating a waste-world." Elsewhere he lists some of the many losses: "Without the soaring birds, the great forests, the sounds and coloration of the insects, the free-flowing streams, the flowering fields, the sight of the clouds by day and the stars at night, we become impoverished in all that makes us human."

Ecological Conversion

Reining in climate change on a global scale seems way beyond my reach, and often I question the value of the little daily actions I hope will make a difference. However, mental climate change is a possibility for each one of us. It is a way to act locally, as local as local can be – our own hearts and minds.

When *isms* become *wasms*, we will have experienced the ecological conversion Pope Francis encourages. We will have embraced the Great Work that Thomas Berry says is the task of all people at this time on our rare and precious planet. And we will have addressed one of the deep sources of the climate crisis through our own mental climate change!

(Thanks to Stephanie Kaza for the concept of mental climate change.)
