



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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## It Indeed Takes a Universe

By Maurice Lange, OMI

Can you recall any mentors from your childhood? Who might have helped you catch your first fish? Took you on a hike? Spent time with you in a garden? Who showed you the larger world “out there”? How did this broaden your perceptions?

As a boy I loved gazing at stars. One summer evening in the late-sixties I was sharing binoculars with the older gentleman next-door. The moon was full and the sky was perfectly clear. He took his time with me and patiently pointed out the different stars, constellations and planets. I was captivated by this larger sense of reality. The Universe indeed changed me that night!

It is probably an understatement to say that children of today are growing up in a vastly different environment from that in which many of us spent our childhood. For better or worse technology, secularism, communications and separation of extended families all create a society that has changed the milieu for those early developmental years of a person's life.

What is especially of concern is the dominant worldview which puts enmity between humans and nature. While in school some children may learn of “the web of life”, yet there is not sufficient hands-on experiential education of this reality. Nor is there adequate support for the insight of creation's integrity by the cultural worldview directed at children (purported by video games, crafted by the advertisers,

measured out through the media, etc.) I am fearful that some children, at best, grow up with a conflicted view of reality and, worse yet, most never even hear of creation's integrity (thus their view of reality is not even conflicted, it is pathetically ignorant).

**When humans do not know where something as basic as food**

**comes from, then the culture is not sustainable.** That which fuels our good works, our prayers, our creativity is taken for granted and so is its Source..... surely this is something radically new and deficient within the human context. Our grandparents and their ancestors all



were much closer physically, psychically and spiritually to that which and those who provided their nourishment.

This new dysfunction of our cultural context breeds new consequences for our youngest: staggering numbers on Ritalin, violent outbursts within schools, a lack of reverence, creativity, wonder and awe. A stretch? Well, in an interconnected universe doesn't it make sense that if we feed our kids “food” grown in an industrialized, commodified, chemically saturated, overcrowded, genetically modified manner which is then refined, processed, adulterated and irradiated ... that we reap what we sow?

**What are some solutions?** Come on, we need some creative thinking!

*(continue on page 2)*



(continued from page 1)

What follows is the story of one idea that we have come up with. This is recounted not to toot our horn but to hopefully **inspire your own imagination and follow-through:**

When we heard that the Village of Godfrey planned to develop a low-impact park next to the novitiate property, I floated the idea for a **children's organic garden** to be part of the park. Christine Favilla, a local resident, shareholder of the community supported garden and project manager for the local Sierra Club, became enthusiastic about the concept and readily joined up to get the ball rolling. Other interested people came together and a non-profit was formed called the "**Community Cultivators**". The Village of Godfrey was open to the idea of

the garden and invited us to approach local schools and youth organizations to survey their interest. Teachers and youth leaders signed on and the first students came to the garden in October, 2002 to adopt their plots. These students returned this past Spring to plant and tend vegetables and flowers. This work has been under the tutelage of the University of Illinois Master Gardeners.

This past April 22, Earth Day, the Village of Godfrey formally opened La Vista Park. It was a beautiful, sunny Spring day and so many folks turned out for the speeches and ribbon cutting. Within that celebration, each distinguished speaker directed attention to

the newly named "**Discovery Garden**". This reflected the communal nature of Discovery Garden (whose subtitle is a "**Children's Organic Community Garden**"). Many local individuals and civic organizations have been generous with their funds, time and well-wishes to bring about this project!

What is most exciting is the first-hand contact that the children get to make with Earth! Cooperating with rain and soil, with the sun and the seasons, a conscious and profound relationship is fostered. The integrity of creation is lived out.

Here's to your own imagination and follow-through in creating possibilities to bring about healing for the Earth! Invite young people to join you. They bring a wonderful energy to whatever they do. ☯

## It Takes A Universe

*The child awakens to a universe. The mind of the child to a world of meaning.  
Imagination to a world of beauty. Emotions to a world of intimacy.*

*It takes a universe to make a child both in outer form and inner spirit. It takes a universe to educate a child.  
A universe to fulfill a child.*

*Each generation presides over the meeting of these two in the succeeding generation. Thus our nursery rhymes.  
Theses early rhymes, these early stories, are the most profound, most lovely,  
most delightful sources of guidance and inspiration the child will ever have.*

*"Start light, star bright..." how memorable, inspiring, instructive, these verses of  
Robert Louis Stevenson from the later years of the last century.*

*So now we write our own verses, bringing the child and the universe into their mutual fulfillment.*

*While the stars ring out in the heavens.*

**-Thomas Berry, CP**

# Emergence of an Ecological Vocation (fourth in the series)

by Gary Huelsmann

The emergence of my ecological vocation is rooted in my family's farming background. As I reflect on my ecological roots, I am struck by all the links those roots have between my family's history, societal changes, good nutrition, psychology and spiritual traditions. Ecology by its very nature builds relationships between individuals (or organisms) and the whole of reality or the universe. **These are my thoughts on my place in the "Universe Story," the importance of family, the community, the Church and being a healthy part of it all!**

Any one who knows me, knows I am proud of my family and my family history. Both my wonderful parents were raised on small family farms in southern Illinois. I always loved hearing stories of how my grandparents grew almost all their own food to feed and nurture their very large, Catholic families. As a small child I remember my grandparents' vegetable gardens, the family orchards, rhubarb and asparagus patches, pickled beets, homemade grape jam, Mason jars of canned peaches, etc. My memories include "cleaning" chickens and assisting with butchering pigs. The food was incredibly healthy and wonderful because it was grown with love and care. There was balance and nothing was wasted. Even the vegetable scraps were fed to the animals. Everything was recycled and stayed on the farm.

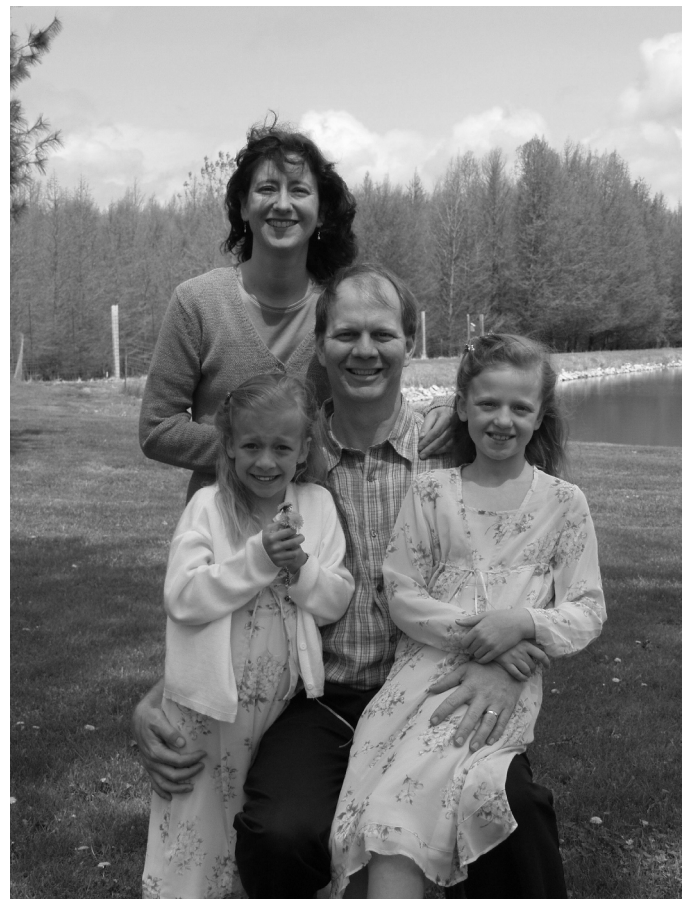
As I matured, the grandparents gardens grew smaller. Orchards and many of the animals began to disappear. The cultural pressures of society affected my family and other families. Consumerism took hold. More of our food came from the supermarket and out of boxes. Mind you, the convenience of not growing our own food allowed for many wonderful leisure activities. I enjoyed family vacations to the mountains, forests, oceans, parks, camping trips and cultural centers. All of this helped my ecological growth as I came to love this beautiful planet.

My family and rural upbringing had a big impact on my sense of place and belonging. My Catholic faith has also been a foundation of my ecological vocation. The creation story in Genesis starts the story. God said it was good. I could relate to the stories in the Old and New Testament of rural families living on the land raising animals, fishing and sharing food. There are

many great images of Jesus breaking bread; sharing and caring for others in the community of which he was a part. To understand much of Scripture is also to understand the connection between human beings, the "Land" and all that grows and lives on that land.

In the center of all the towns of the "Land" I grew up in, Clinton County Illinois, stood a Catholic Church with a tall steeple. The parishes were the focal points of these farming communities. At these churches people came together to eat at parish picnics, weddings, funeral receptions or went home to eat with their families after Baptisms, First Communions and Confirmations.

I suppose it was these parish communities that led me to explore the vocation of Priesthood, where I spent five years in the Catholic seminary. While at St. John Vianney Seminary on the campus of St. Thomas University, I was attracted to the "Social Justice"



*Shareholders Gary and Christine Huelsmann  
with twin daughters Mariah and Chloe.*

committee. My apostolic outreach in this committee ranged from rural life issues to nuclear disarmament; from issues of feeding the hungry to helping the homeless. After my final year of graduate theology in a Chicago suburb, I discerned the “celibate” vocation of priesthood was not my calling as a vocation. I strongly desired a family of my own.

I then went to work at Catholic Social Services as a social worker covering six counties in rural, southern Illinois. While living in Mt. Carmel, Illinois for a year I was struck by the importance of local food sources. I observed local families getting together for what they called “Chowders” and sharing in the local harvest from gardens and hunting. All over the Midwest I saw the struggles of small family farmers. The shift to very large factory farms that grow few varieties of crops depletes the soul of “agri-culture.” It saddens me to watch the decline of rural communities. It is exciting now to take part in supporting the farming vocation that Amy Cloud has at the Community Supported Garden at La Vista.


To continue my education I moved to St. Louis, Missouri where I earned a Masters of Social Work degree at St. Louis University, a wonderfully diverse and social justice conscious school. One of the main themes or theories of Social Work is how everything is connected to everything else. I also learned this as I viewed and discussed the “Canticle of the Cosmos” video series by Brian Swimme at the Oblate Ecological Initiative office. There is cause and effect in everything. How we act in one place also has an effect in another place. This is true of individuals, families, communities, the environment and the planet at large. In our culture we often are dealing with the symptoms and not the underlying causes of respecting each other, our environment and ourselves.

After graduate school and for the past 14 years I have worked for a behavioral health company in a variety of roles from a clinical therapist for individuals and family to my current position as an Account Executive. Currently, I consult with large corporations about such issues as stress reduction, change management, substance abuse prevention and intervention, crisis and workplace violence interventions, disease management and employee health. During these years I have worked with issues that individuals and families face in our society and workplace and have come to understand the connection between health and addictions and our choices around nutrition and social interaction.

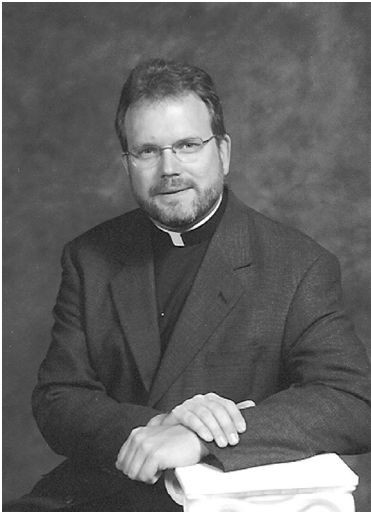
**I think my involvement in the creation of the Community Supported Garden at La Vista takes me to the next level: a deeper level of spiritual connection between God, His creation, myself and my family’s nutritional health, the health of my community and the land which sustains us all.**

I have been happily married for more than eleven years to Christine, who is a wonderful, creative and loving wife and mother. I recall our wedding Mass among the support of all our family and friends. After the ceremony my father approached the podium and spoke of a wish. My father, who generally is not a public speaker, made a speech in which he wished “Eternal Life” for Christine and me. In his explanation of Eternal Life he talked about having more children and bringing them and Amber, my stepdaughter, out to the country to enjoy fishing, catching frogs, enjoying nature and sharing the love of family. He was saying “Eternal Life” starts here and now with the gifts God gives us in this life to work toward the Kingdom.

Chloe and Mariah, our 8-year-old twin daughters, have certainly brought some of that “Eternal Life” into our home. They are filled with life and joy. I enjoy watching them explore nature, help grandma and grandpa in the garden and relate to creation. Family life is great and creating a sense of belonging and presence in the greater part of creation is a sacred part of my role as a husband and father. Nature walks with the girls and Christine in our neighborhood are special times relating to each other and creation. Watching the sunset over the Mississippi River in our back yard certainly brings that sense of belonging to our place on the planet.

Though I have a wonderful history and support on which to draw in my emerging ecological vocation, it is a struggle to integrate everything into my own and my family’s life. It is easy to get overwhelmed by the pressure to “do” and consume in our society. My goal is to make the best life choices I can to respect God’s creation. Some recent choices I am most proud of include buying a Hybrid Gas Electric, super ultra low emissions car and, more importantly, becoming a shareholder at the Community Supported Garden at La Vista. When I see my happy, smiling girls I know I must work toward co-creating (with God) a better, healthier world in which they can grow and enjoy “Eternal Life”. 

## Creation the Classroom: Christ the Teacher



*Jim Brobst, OMI, a native of Alton, IL, is the Formation Director of the Oblate House of Theology in Chicago. He is also a part-time student at the Catholic Theological Union working towards his Doctor of Ministry.*

Here we are at the beginning of the summer. Graduates have graduated, the long rest from academic learning has just begun for those of us who live in academic settings. The sources of our learning are often envisioned as institutions - schools and universities. Yet some of the brightest minds do not always fare well in such settings, some of the most important lessons are learned outside the classroom. But for all of us, learning continues, be it formally or informally.

**Practical experience and concrete situations are perhaps the most important places of learning.** For the past six years, I've been involved in overseeing the formation of men who are called to become brothers and priests for the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, (the Catholic religious congregation which sponsors the Oblate Ecological Initiative). I've seen first-hand how much people develop when they get the opportunity to take and test their classroom knowledge in ministerial situations where they deal with the stuff of life. They end up testing not only their knowledge, but themselves as well. They become better ministers for having done so, and future generations will be better served in the process.

Of course, wise and competent guidance along the way is crucial. In short, whether in ministry or any other skill, one of the best ways to learn is to jump in and "get your hands dirty" next to someone with skill and experience.

That's the kind of learning which the Oblate Ecological Initiative provides. It's setting is essential to the message. Hand-in-hand with the gardens of Community Supported Agriculture, and in the setting of the beautiful woods, the bluffs, and a nature preserve overlooking one of the greatest rivers on Earth, one not only recalls the words "God saw that it was good" from the creation accounts of the book of Genesis, one experiences that


goodness first hand. It's one thing to talk about being in love, it's another to be in love. Likewise, it's one thing to discuss one's faith, it's another to have it come alive by getting one's own hands "dirty" in the blessedness of everything that God made and "saw that it was good."

Jesus himself knew how to use creation as a classroom for his own teaching. He never published a book as we know it. Jesus frequently taught by using short stories and parables. Many of these use images of the growing, living stuff of creation. Mustard seeds, seeds of grain, weeds sown among wheat, bad soil, good soil, fig trees, vineyards, vines and branches . . . Jesus frequently used pastoral images to make his point come alive.

**In a culture where we are so often separated from the natural, created world, re-connecting with it empowers us to resonate more deeply with Jesus' own sayings.** One hopes that these sayings will bear stronger fruit in the lives who have considered them in a context such as the La Vista Ecological Learning Center. In this way, Jesus' teaching can connect more strongly with lived, touched, felt experience and are not only ideas as heard in Church.

Jesus also knew the importance of preaching by example. His own propensity for challenging the prevailing opinions and mind-set of his day was not without ramifications. He was willing to get his own hands dirty in controversial issues of his day - dirty enough to get nailed to a cross for his counter-cultural pronouncements. He knew well his own people's history and traditions, and their lived experience. Because he spoke with authority, in ways that made sense to both head and heart, his lessons hit home enough that we still probe their own depth some two-thousand years later. Jesus was able to speak to people across all ages, to people of his own and other religions, to friends and strangers, to his disciples and his enemies.

Likewise, the needs of our environment today are potentially a source of common ground for an amazing diversity of people. While each person is a unique individual created by God, there are some basic things we all have in common. It's harder to think of anything more immediately crucial than clean air, nutritious food, pure water, and knowledge of each one's own value and dignity, as created by the One who brings us into being and sustains our lives.

Thus, I am proud that the Congregation of Catholic Missionary priests & brothers to which I belong have invested our land, our time, and our talent towards the Ecological Initiative in Godfrey. I am equally proud of the many local people who are joining us in this effort. 



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*“In our own time we are witnessing a growth of an ecological awareness which needs to be encouraged, so that it will lead to practical programs and initiatives.”*

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-Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Bartholomew I from their “Common Declaration” June, 2002

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## 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 (CSG) 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 will put newly interested shareholders on a waiting list. Volunteer opportunities definitely exist for different tasks in the office as well as the garden.

Fr. Maurice is also available for presentations and retreats at other locations. Contact him with your requests.

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 Lange, OMI for directions.

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

## *A Note from the Director....*

*Ahh, Summer! Time to unwind, make a change, go on vacation, enjoy both yourself and what's around you.*

*However just because it's Summer and school's out does not mean that we stop learning. Whether we are young or not-so-young, Summer provides us with ample opportunities to have our perceptions broadened from the primary teacher and the initial classroom: **Nature herself**. This theme is echoed in the lead article in this edition of *La Vista Visions* as well as in the beautiful writing by my friend, Jim Brobst.*

*How do our environments shape us? How does experiential learning form values? Clearly the intimate contact with nature and the values of a farming culture deeply impacted Gary Huelsmann, one of the members of the Community Supported Garden. Check out pages 3 and 4 to see how Gary's ecological vocation has developed.*

*Summer is associated with fruitfulness, generosity and youth. Take time during this season to enjoy summer's gifts and to ponder how these elicit your own fruitfulness and abundance.*

**- - Maurice Lange, OMI**