



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

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## Who Do We Need to Be in 2015?

By Mary Pendergast, RSM

"The great work of our times, I would say, is moving the human community from its present situation as a destructive presence on the planet to a benign or mutually enhancing presence. It's that simple." (Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*)

Each of us, in our own way, has been working on making that vision a reality in our own homes, in our local communities and in the larger society since we first grasped its meaning in *The Great Work*. Our sincere efforts have resulted in hundreds of thousands of actions aimed at both halting destruction and on constructing a way of living in harmony with the natural world. We can look at all that has been accomplished from delaying pipelines, to growing our own food, to cleaning rivers, to demanding action on climate and say, with pride, "Good work."

**Is it enough? Probably our doing will never be enough, as important as it is.**

Today, we are called to connect with the transformative power at work in the Universe and to realize that something greater than ourselves is moving through us.

We need to **BE**. We need to be consciously connected to the Divine within us and to its manifestations in Nature. We need to inquire deeply into the questions of our time and listen to the guidance arising. Who are we? What is our role? What is required of us in our corner of the world? What does it mean to be living at a time of mass extinction? What is the grief that is longing to be felt? Where does it come from? How have we been complicit in the diminishment of the Earth Community? What is our relationship with the web of life? Who are we?

We live in a moment of planetary peril. The period of the full flowering of Earth is over and her health and vitality are on the brink. Nothing this destructive has happened in the last 65 million years, yet much of the general public is not even aware that it is happening! We have altered the chemistry of the atmosphere, bringing the CO<sub>2</sub> levels higher than they

have been in 800,000 years. The ocean contains 400 dead zones, an Atlantic garbage patch, and a Pacific gyre. We live in the midst of the sixth mass extinction! Heartbreakingly, beautiful beings are already gone and won't come back. The World Wildlife Federation announced in October that we have lost 52% of animal species since 1970. . "Put another way, in less than two human generations, population sizes of vertebrate species have dropped by half. These are the living beings that constitute the fabric of the ecosystems which sustain life on Earth."



**Who do we need to be?** If we are ever to move into the collective transformation of our society, it will require a new definition of what is possible for the human. Thomas Berry called for the reinvention of humanity at the species level. So, who do we need to be in 2015 and into this precarious future? Since I can really only change my own self, I'll begin with my own choices. What are my thoughts, words, feelings and actions producing in myself and in the world? Do I cultivate destructive

tendencies in myself? What consumer choices do I make that contribute to destruction? How do I eat? Are my food choices sustainable? What do I wear? Where does it come from and what are the conditions under which it is made? How am I wasteful? In what ways do I confuse my needs with my wants?

What are my habits? Am I honest and truthful? When I examine my mental, physical, emotional and spiritual health, what needs to go, what needs to be added? What am I like inside: am I negative, destructive, angry or violent in my personal life? How do I treat others, human and non-human? Do I live as if I know that everything is connected to everything else? How do I show that I act in harmony with all creation? Do I cultivate peace in myself and in my immediate environment?

How does my life align with the vision of bringing forth an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just human presence on the planet?

(Continued on page 6)

## Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends of La Vista,

You've probably had those synchronistic moments that provide invaluable insights and wonderful "Aha!" experiences. We treasure them as messages that make us feel a deep truth: that we are part of something invisible, powerful, exciting.

I was driving in South St. Louis when one of these synchronicities presented itself by way of a billboard. The words LIVE LARGE ran across the top. Underneath was a green compact car. Superimposed on the car in a shadowy grey color were two bicycles atop and a hitch pulling an enormous RV behind. Get the message?

I was drawn to the wording because I had been reading a book which uses the phrase "live large" frequently. In fact, when I first spotted the billboard, I was in a position to only see the wording, and I couldn't wait to see the rest. As I inched forward and caught the message I was dismayed. I thought maybe someone out there was willing to sponsor an advertisement encouraging what I had been reading about – the call to live in a way that nurtures **largeness of soul** – quite the opposite from "living large" as a consumer!

James Hollis, in his book *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life: How to Finally, Really Grow Up*, reminds the reader that we are continuously called to largeness of life, to respond to the urge of the soul and embrace a life deep with sacred meaning. This newsletter and the programs we offer at La Vista are one response to the summons of our souls to LIVE LARGE.

In her article *Who Do We Need to Be in 2015?*, Mary Pendergast, RSM, invites us to live large in the new year by offering many questions to promote deep thinking about our daily lives and spirituality.

Reading Beth Terry's book, *Plastic-Free: How I Kicked the Plastic Habit and How You Can Too*, offers a direct challenge to consumerism, giving us ideas about how to make a difference in a very concrete way. You will likely find it in your local library.

And of course, our weeklong *Exploring the Sacred Universe Earth Literacy Program* empowers participants to go home and live a large life, one set in the biggest context of all, the entire Universe! It doesn't get larger than that.

Thank you for your companionship on this lifelong adventure as we strive live large on our rare and precious planet.

For La Vista,  
Maxine Pohlman, SSND



The Novitiate Community, our farmers Eric and Crystal Stevens, Virginia Nesmith, and Sister Maxine

## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human Earth Relationship

### *How I Kicked the Plastic Habit and How You Can Too* by Beth Terry

Reading this book will motivate and inform you!

In a clever and non-threatening manner, Terry invites readers to look at their own **plastic consumption** and figure out what changes are possible. She offers a multitude of practical tips for anyone desiring to get concrete about the fact that we are inextricably woven into the web of life.

The author offers **new, repurposed, and homemade alternatives** to many plastic products. Throughout the book are easy-to-use green tip boxes. She explores the benefits and drawbacks of recycling and whether it really does save energy or not.

The section on **plastic beverage bottles** adds much to the conversation. In the "Take Action in Your Communi-

ty" part, Terry suggests organizations, articles, books and films that provide more information and motivation.

At the end of many chapters, she includes a **Questions to Ask** section to help the reader figure out good options when faced with a plastic dilemma.

In her conclusion Terry encourages us:

*"Whoever you are, whatever your age, gender, or economic status, there is something for you to do in the fight against plastic pollution. There are so many ways to reach out and connect with the wider world. There are so many different ways to participate in this global movement. All talents and skills are needed. Just pick one thing and get started."*

# LIVE LARGE!

## REDUCE YOUR PLASTIC FOOTPRINT

### Ponder these plastic facts . . .

- In 2012, the United States generated almost 14 million tons of plastics as containers and packaging, about 11 million tons as durable goods such as appliances, and almost 7 million tons as nondurable goods, such as plates and cups.
- Over 4 million plastic bottles are used by American every hour.
- Approximately 500 nautical miles off the California coast sits a growing "plastic island," a gargantuan patch of floating plastic trash held together by currents stretching across the northern Pacific almost as far as Japan. This "plastic island" is made up of about 7 billion pounds of plastic garbage, and measures about twice the size of Texas.
- Every piece of plastic that was ever produced still exists.

### How can we change our cultural *use-and-toss* mentality?

KNOWING – learn about the effects of our plastic waste mentality on the health of oceans, fish, humans and all of life.

BEING – make the connection between your personal spirituality and your treatment of the whole sacred Earth community. Live your belief in the oneness and sacredness of all.

DOING – commit to reducing your personal plastic footprint. Work for systemic change by using your voting power. Talk to others about alternatives to a plastic life.

## PLASTICS: Bad News/Good News

The **bad news** is that plastic is becoming a worldwide problem because of increased use of "non- recycled" plastics made of polystyrene and polypropylene. Since there is little return value, recyclers toss them in to landfills where they never decompose.

One piece of **good news** comes from an MIT alumna who invented a continuous, zero-toxic-emission system that converts non-recycled plastics into crude oil. "Plastic comes from oil to begin with, so it makes sense to convert it back to usable fuel," Bakaya says. "The goal is to end land-filled plastic waste forever – not just domestically, but also globally." (MIT News June 20, 2014)

The **bad news** is that there are five massive garbage gyres; one in the Indian Ocean, two in the Pacific Ocean and another two in the Atlantic Ocean. As plastic trash gets caught in ocean currents, gyres come together. Most of the gyres are plastic which does not biodegrade. The plastic in these debris fields will last for hundreds of years, creating problems for ocean ecosystems.

The **good news** is that people are designing innovative approaches to removing plastic waste from water like the Seawater Skyscraper. It is a portable, self-supported solar-hydro power station that generates electricity using seawater while removing plastic waste. The Seawater filters ocean water and removes plastics and other particles which are recycled in an onboard plant..

(<http://globalwarmingisreal.com/2014/04/10/ocean-garbage-problems-solutions/>)

The bad news is truly bad; the good news is encouraging. The bottom line, however, is that we need to find **alternatives** to conventional plastics which don't contain harmful chemicals and that are biodegradable. And we need to take Beth Terry's advice, (see page two) and work on living a plastic free life.

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## Program Calendar, January – June, 2015

Registration is necessary for all events. Call 618-466-5004 and leave your name and number attending.

### Winterfires Coffeehouse

**Saturday, January 10, 7:00 - 9:00 pm**

This popular event promises an evening of touching poetry, good humor, musical surprises, delightful camaraderie, delicious desserts, Mexican hot chocolate, and aromatic coffee! Join us at the main house as we gather around the fireplace to enjoy a magical evening of local talent and amazing creativity. Please bring original or found poetry, story, jokes, music, and a snack/dessert to share.

Optional donations gratefully accepted.

### Flatbreads: Learn and Taste!

**Saturday, February 7, 9:30 - Noon**

Flatbreads and crackers are found in many cultures around the world, a pleasing and healthy part of many diets. You will learn how to make Colombian arepas, Mexican tortillas, and American crackers. You'll leave confident in your ability to include making these tasty morsels among your culinary skills. We'll also serve Colombian coffee, Mexican chocolate and herbal tea. Cost: \$15.

### La Vista Vegetarians: A Gathering

**Monday, Feb. 16, 6:00 - 8:00pm**

This meeting over a potluck dinner is an opportunity to learn more about vegetarianism and to share information, food, recipes, companionship, and support. If there is enough interest, we'll create a group that will meet seasonally throughout the year. Vegetarianism is a great way to contribute to the health of your family and our planet since **how we eat determines to a great extent how the world is used**. Please bring a vegetarian dish to share. Hot and cold herbal drinks will be provided. Cost: \$10.00

### Spring Equinox and World Water Day

**Saturday, March 21, 2:00 - 4:00 pm**

This year our spring equinox event gives us the opportunity to unite with people all over the world celebrating World Water Day. Together we will create a vision of people who care about Mother Earth and all living beings, pray for a restoration of balance and healing of the world's rivers and lakes, oceans and creeks, and give thanks for our own special water, the great Mississippi River. Meet on the patio overlooking the river and please bring a small container of water from a source that is special to you. Optional donations gratefully accepted.

### Earth Hour and More

**Saturday, March 28, 4:00 - 8:30 pm**

On this last Saturday night in March we join people all over the world to raise awareness about our need to take responsibility for a sustainable future. Come for part of the event or the whole shebang!

4:00 View and discuss the documentary

*The City Dark*

5:30 Evening Prayer by candlelight

6:00 Candlelight Potluck Supper

7:15 Sunset and Earth Hour around a fire pit overlooking the Mississippi River

### DIY Earth Day Sabbath

**Sunday, April 19, 10:00 am - 1:00 pm**

Create your own Earth Day celebration at La Vista. After a gathering ritual you will be free to do some bird watching or photography, hike in the woods, sit on the bluffs and watch the river roll by, enjoy the lodge, read a book from the Ecology Center or whatever activity deepens your love of our rare and precious planet. At noon we'll share a potluck picnic and conclude with a simple sending ceremony, ready to continue our efforts for people and the planet.

Please bring a picnic dish to share.

Optional donations welcome.

### Through the Eyes of a Biologist: Presentation and Walk in the Oblates' Woods Nature Preserve

**Saturday, May 2, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm**

What do you see when you gaze upon the beauty of our natural world? Our life experiences, education, and professions train our eyes to see the world in a multitude of different ways. Eric Wright, our presenter, will discuss how becoming a professional biologist has changed the way he sees the world. This event will include a presentation on local history and a brief field trip through the Oblates' Woods Nature Preserve (Wear long pants and hiking boots.).

**Eric Wright** is a Natural Heritage Resident with the Illinois Department of Natural Resource and a Granite City native. He is currently a graduate student in Natural Resource and Environmental Science at the University of Illinois.

Limit 30 people

Donations to Missionary Oblates to fund land stewardship activities will be accepted.

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**Enclosed is my donation to support the newsletter and the programming at La Vista.**

Name	Phone
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**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**E-mail address**

**La Vista Ecological Learning Center 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035**



**Activities throughout the week include:**  
presentations by a variety of speakers, sacred rituals,  
journaling, art, field trip, dialogue, cooking and gardening.

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



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(Continued from page 1)

Who am I in my inmost being and how is it manifesting itself in the outer world? Do I consciously participate in the transformation of humanity? How aligned am I to Divine Love and to the great teachings, "Do unto others," "Love your enemy," "Be compassionate, as your loving God is compassionate"?

**We need a strong intention to use the precious opportunity this life offers.** We need to enter our lives each day with this sense of expansion. If we allow ourselves to be "used" by our ever-compassionate God, and commit ourselves to building a society that reflects and reveres the sacred and interconnected nature of all life, we will draw closer to living in the wholeness of the present moment.

Thomas Merton told us just fifty years ago, "You do not need to know precisely what is happening, or exactly where it is all going. What you need is to recognize the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment, and to embrace them with courage, faith and hope."

May your New Year be blessed!

May we transform ourselves!

**Mary Pendergast, RSM**, is the director of ecology for the Sisters of Mercy Northeast Community. In addition to being a children's educator for 38 years, Sister Mary Pendergast has focused on environmental issues since the 1980s. Her activities include serving as the vice chair of Mercy Ecology, Inc., participating in Oxfam's Sisters on the Planet, being a coordinator for the conferences Planet in Crisis: Mercy Response and To Act in Harmony with All Creation.



