



# 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

info@lavistaelc.org

Summer Fall 2017  
Volume 15, Issue 46

## Creation as Sacrament: Encountering the Divine

Rev. James P. Brobst

Have you ever stood in awe and wonder at a night sky? Bathed in the ocean or been caught in a raging torrent? Survived a major hail storm in the forest only to smell the wonder of so many crushed leaves and branches releasing the fresh, living incense of their fresh sap? Been humbled and overwhelmed at the birth of your child after enduring nine months or so of hoping, worrying, anticipating and preparing? Held the hand of and watched the life slip away from the eyes of a loved one who has fought a long battle with a terminal illness? If you can say "yes" to any of these or similar questions, you've probably sought a sense of meaning and presence deeper than what is obvious to your senses in that moment.

Since time immemorial, the human race has been searching for that which is beyond simple, practical and immediate. Primitive musical instruments predate the invention of weapons. Ancient cave paintings and ritual sites are proof of our innate desire for connection to that which defies immediate and simple connections. We are a species that seeks "the divine," in every possible way. We have terms for our various limited perceptions of the Divine. We may call it "God," "meaning," "purpose," or many other things according to our connection (or lack of connection) to a religious tradition.

Ancient and modern peoples alike have various ways and places for encountering divinity. Rituals, sacred texts, consecrated places (natural and human-built), and ways of meditation or prayer express our understanding of divinity, however limited that understanding may be. Divine powers are believed to engender creation, bring life and death, and influence the world around us. The collective wisdom of historical communities of faith eventually becomes codified (some communities more so than others!). At their best, these traditions are foundations for ongoing spiritual growth and human maturation. With this view, the question "are

you religious or spiritual?" can easily be answered "both."

I am unabashedly part of the organized religion crowd, being a Roman Catholic priest. Although many people make a big thing of the major divide between Science and Creationism (A literal, biblical view of the timeline and process of creation), my own tradition welcomes scientific inquiry and finds no need to find scientific and biblical views of creation at odds with one another. My personal perceptions of nature and science deepen my faith, and are entirely consistent with the deeper teaching of my own faith tradition.



A clear case in point is the basic definition which most Christian denominations have for sacraments. The specific definition of the word and the numbers of rituals and behaviors they recognize differs by denomination and throughout history. The current definition in the Roman Catholic tradition is "an outward sign, instituted by Christ, which gives grace." The current enumeration (since the year 1547) stands at seven, which are taught to have sources in the four Gospels of

the New Testament. However, this number was in the hundreds in the time of St. Augustine, who operated from a simpler definition of sacraments – "an outward sign of an inward grace."

Either definition should show that all of creation is indeed a sacrament for any biblically-based believer in Jesus! While we believe that Jesus was a historic individual, his divine nature as God precedes all time, and indeed all creation exists in him and through Christ. (John Ch. 1, Colossians Ch. 1, Ephesians Ch. 1)

This is evident in how the various Christian sacraments (and worship of other religions) use the basics of creation to encounter the divine: water, oil, bread, wine, touch, movement, music, verbal communication, sensory beauty. The celebration of sacraments is not only a tradition-inspired way of ensuring helpful connection with the di-

(Continued on page 6)

## Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends of La Vista,

A warm welcome to the summer/fall issue of La Vista Visions. Here we are in early June on the verge of another beautiful season of the year and of our lives. Karl Rahner, a Roman Catholic theologian, is quoted as having said, "God is not the unknowable, but the infinitely knowable." I love that idea, and I think of how each season of the year reveals the Holy Mystery differently, offering a variety of opportunities to "know" the Divine. A lovely thought.

Jim Brobst, OMI, in our first article, helps us to recognize encounters with the Divine as sacraments. In our world of consumerism where we tend to treat the natural world as a resource, his words remind us of another worldview, a reverential one. We are called to an alternative reality, one that affirms our dignity as spiritual human beings on a rare, precious, and sacred planet.

On page 3 Virginia Nesmith shares her thought-provoking poem where you will find images on encountering the Divine in experiences of "home". Having directed the National Farm Workers Ministry for many years, her reflections ring true and call us to expand our notion of ways to encounter

the Holy Mystery in our lives.

Finally, I hope you can join us for one of our summer or fall programs where you just might encounter Holy Mystery through a speaker, a concert, or even a honeysuckle bush!

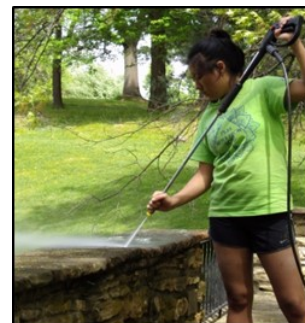
For La Vista,  
Maxine Pohlman, SSND



(From L to R) Fr. Antonio Ponce, OMI, Fr. Seamus Finn, OMI, Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND, Christine Ilewski-Huelsmann and Gary Huelsmann participated in the People's Climate March in Washington D.C. on Trump's 100th day in office on April 29th.

## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human Earth Relationship

This past April, Seniors from Marquette Catholic High School in Alton, IL, spent two days enhancing La Vista as part of Senior Mission Week. They removed honeysuckle, spread mulch in the Pollinator Garden, painted, power washed, and delighted us with their energy and Christian generosity!





# HOME

by Virginia Nesmith

Home

Loving parents in youthful days

A husband of many years

Where children land for holidays or respite

Sibling conversation that repeats itself

Christmas with cousins

Winter fires with friends

Music, more music

Laughter

Familiar streets, familiar faces

from times long past

Dogwood and redbud in woods I know

Constellations I can call by name

All filling, all mattering

But still I search

oft stumbling

For that Capital H

HOME.....

No guns, no bombs,

No slavery, no borders

Enough for all

To eat, to live, to love

To rest a heart

in God, Allah, Yahweh, Universe, Spirit ...

So I pray

To the monarch who knows how to get  
to Michoacán

The swallow to Capistrano

The salmon back to the river

To Dorothy Day, beacon of the  
homeless

To Gandhi and Mandela, re-claimers of  
home with those from whom it was  
stolen

To St. Francis, proclaimer of a home for  
all creatures

To the migrant worker who never  
forgets where home was

And to all of you searchers and finders,  
Helping lead me on

Calling all the children Home.

January 30, 2016, for La Vista's Winterfires Coffeehouse



## Program Calendar June - December, 2017

### Pollinator Garden Fundraiser and Summer Solstice Celebration

Saturday, June 24 5:00 – 8:00 PM

**Spend a relaxing evening at La Vista for a good cause! Join us and be part of this special effort.**

- Enjoy great music
- Savor delicious hors d'oeuvres
- Revel in sunset on the bluffs
- Contribute to the ongoing creation of our pollinator garden

**Music by:** Chaz and Friends, and Oblate Novices featuring American and Celtic Folk Rock, Irish and African traditional

**Donation:**

\$15 Adults, \$10 Students, free for children under 10

**Registration:** Use the registration form on page 5.

**Please bring a lawn chair.**

### The Wild Garden & the Listening Heart An Afternoon of Contemplation

Saturday, October 21 1:30 – 3:30 pm

Come and explore how Creation itself can be the springboard of our prayer to God. We will, using the practice of **Visio Divina**, allow images of creation or our gazing into the wild garden around us to become the gentle breeze by which God speaks to our heart.

A brief introduction to the praxis of Visio Divina (cousin to Lectio Divina!) will precede our exploration of how Creation itself can be the canvas we contemplate in order to allow Creation to truly speak of the glory, beauty and heart of God. Come with comfortable clothing warm enough to allow you to be outside. In case of inclement weather, we will remain inside with images from Creation.

**Presenter:** Mark Dean, OMI, is on the Retreat Team at King's House in Belleville, IL

**Cost:** \$15

**Registration:** Please use the form on page 5.

### Think About Honeysuckle Tables: A Hands-On Workshop

Saturday, September 16 10:00am-3:00pm

Artist Dale Dufer is passionate about woodworking and eliminating invasive honeysuckle. Putting these together, he creates honeysuckle tables. Join us, and you will not only create a unique, one of a kind, handmade table, but you will also learn the forever-valuable skills of tool usage, balance, aesthetics, and creating structures out of repurposed material. You will take home table legs with a sub base, and you will need to provide your own table top for this special indoor or outdoor table.



**Please bring a lunch.**

**Presenter:** Dale Dufer is an artist and wood worker

**Cost:** \$35

**Registration:** Please use the form on page 5.

### Autumn Equinox and a Celebration of Bees

Saturday, September 23 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Join us for the beginning of the autumn season and celebrate BEES! You will hear Pat and Jerry Veicht share their passion for bees and honey, and you'll visit their apiaries on the farm at LaVista where they have 36 hives.

**Cost:** Optional donations gratefully accepted.

**Registration is requested:** Call 618-466-5004 or e-mail us at [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org).

**Please bring an autumn snack or drink to share.**

**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



**TWO SPECIAL OMI EVENTS:  
Ecological Programs hosted by  
the Shrine of Our Lady of the  
Snows and La Vista**

Join us for one or both events and be  
inspired by the wisdom of Laudato  
Si' and special presenters.

**Caring For Our Common Home  
Symposium on the Environment**

Saturday, August 12 9:00 – 11:30 am

Featured Speakers...

**MIKE ROBERTS**

Former KSDK-Channel 5 Meteorologist

**DR. PETER RAVEN**

Senior Science Advisor

Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Science

**VIC HAMER**

Founder of Give Me Water Lord

**Cost:** \$20

**Registration:** Call 618-394-6270 or  
email [Programs@snows.org](mailto:Programs@snows.org)

**Held at and sponsored by:  
National Shrine of  
Our Lady of the Snows**

**Come, Experience La Vista -  
Oblates Caring for  
Our Common Home**

Saturday, October 7 9:15 am – 12:30 pm

Come and see how the Missionary Oblates  
have connected spirituality and ecology in car-  
ing for the 255 acres of bluffs, forest, mead-  
ows, and fields they have called **home** for over  
sixty years. Discover the deep connections  
between faith and land.



Featured Speakers ...

**Jack Lau, OMI**, Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate

**Debbie Newman**, Natural Areas Preservation  
Specialist

**Virginia Nesmith**, former Executive Director of the  
National Farmworkers Ministry

**Alley Ringhausen**, Executive Director of the Great  
Rivers Land Trust

**Virginia Woulfe-Beile**, Three Rivers Project Con-  
servation Field Representative for the Sierra Club

**Options for touring La Vista...**

Haywagon ride, guided hike, virtual tour via  
slideshow, or self-directed walking tour

**Cost:** \$15.00 Includes light refreshments

**Registration:** Please use the form above.



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

**GO!**  
**Stand in**  
**awe and wonder!**  
**Be baptized**  
**along with future**  
**generations in**  
**church and in the**  
**wind and water**  
**of beach or**  
**stream.**

**-Jim Brobst, OMI**

---

(Continued from page 1)

vine. It is also a way to train our discerning eyes and hearts to see divine presence beyond the moment of worship. If the fullness of God can be tasted and touched and seen and felt and smelled in all of these things within worship, we can also encounter them beyond the places and times of worship. This is not to take away the uniqueness of traditionally prescribed ways of religious worship, but to learn from them a way to find the divine presence above, below, beside, before and behind us in all things and at all times.

Religious traditions give us various lenses with which to survey the magnificent expanse that is the divine project, to interpret its meaning and to share that with each other. Starry night sky or rolling ocean waves, animals or family or human tribe, feet on a mountain top or lovers' bodies interlaced, city or country, plant or mineral, gothic cathedral or grassland prairie, there is nothing so secular that it cannot bear the fullness of the sacred.

Altar, kitchen table and country campfire may not be equally recognized for sacred ritual use in every faith community, yet each is a possible place of encounter with that which lies beyond us. Baptismal font, the pond in a meadow and

the ocean voyage of our immigrant ancestors are all their own places of sacred passage and finding new life. Jesus himself frequently used the image of a full banquet for the Reign of God, as did the prophet Isaiah. I suspect the listeners envisioned more than a tiny unleavened cracker and a sip of wine for each participant!

So – GO! Stand in awe and wonder! Be baptized along with your future generations in church and in the wind and water of the beach or stream. Revel in the wafting incense of a spring garden or an inner-city temple. Until we join our departed friends in eternity, divinity awaits us in the here and now – in all of creation – if we can learn to open our mind and our senses to its presence and wonder.

**Rev. James P. Brobst** is a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate and has been a priest for over 26 years. Currently serving in leadership for the U.S. Province, he has been interested in nature, sciences and environmental issues from a young age. He was instrumental in garnering support for founding the Oblate Ecological Initiative.

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