



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

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Summer 2006  
Volume 5, Issue 18

## “I Will Make the Whole Earth My Altar”

by Constance Kozel, RSM

A marine biologist was walking along the ocean beach when movement some distance away in the ocean caught his attention: three whales were swimming toward the shore. He knew immediately what was happening: they were about to beach themselves. That would mean sure death for them. In a split second he dove into the waters and swam toward them. He placed both his hands against the side of one of the agitated giant creatures. It kept thrashing and thrashing, but he held his hands steady. Then gradually the thrashing subsided and ceased. Somehow he was able to gently turn the whale out toward the open sea and it swam off. He then turned his attention to the second whale which was equally agitated. He stayed with it in the same way as with the first while it thrashed until it too became calm and he was able to direct it toward safer waters. As it turned and swam away, the third whale followed.

Thomas King, S.J., Teilhard scholar and one who has integrated Teilhard's vision into his own life, suggested another form of prayer inspired by Teilhard's Mass on the World. Teilhard began to develop this prayer when he was without the elements of bread and wine to celebrate Mass. He prayed it even when he had the bread and wine. The



*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin  
looking over the Narbada valley.*

world became his altar and on it he placed all the works of the whole creation to be transformed into the body of Christ. King suggests we name very specifically, as did Teilhard, good works of friends, family, community, etc. reaching out to include the entire earth. We can add the work of the many creatures like worms and bacteria that contribute to healthy soils, trees of the forest that help clean the air, all that provide food and manifest beauty. It is through our conscious offering that all contribute to the building of the Body of Christ. Then, with Teilhard, we can pray, “Receive, O Lord, this all-embracing host which your whole creation, moved by your

magnetism, offers you this day.”

Sr. Carol Jean Valle, SSJ heard this story of kinship and compassion from the hero of the story himself. She, in turn, related it to participants of a retreat: “*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. Mystic and Prophet.*” Carol suggested that in our prayer we imagine ourselves placing our hands on the agitated earth which is thrashing from the violence and destruction that it is experiencing. There is violence between and among humans and between humans and the waters, air, soil and myriad other creatures of earth. Our prayer can enable us to stay the course in practices of non-violence toward all that help calm and heal.

All of the pain and sufferings of the world—again very specifically—are placed in the chalice to be transformed into the Blood of Christ. There is deep mystery here. It is easy to see those works which contribute to growth, but it takes deep faith to recognize the saving power of the pain and suffering. Yet, it is built into the very nature of the universe: beings die that others might live from the level of the microbes to the supreme example of Christ. And so Teilhard's prayer: “Receive, O Lord, this all embracing wine which your whole creation, moved by your magnetism, offers you this day. This wine, our pain, is of itself, but a current that passes....” He ends, “Lord, make us one.”

(continue on back page)

## Letter from the Director


### Summer Solstice, 2006

Welcome to the Summer edition of *La Vista Visions*! Ahh, Summer—so many fun memories tied to the out-of-doors. As a child I remember the huge amount of time being spent inside of classrooms during the seasons of Autumn, Winter and Spring that I couldn't wait for the glory of Summer—to be outside at last! Swimming, fishing, playing ball, hiking, catching fireflies, building tree houses all were summer pastimes. What do you recall from youthful Summers past?

This Summer at La Vista finds our 4<sup>th</sup> season of the **Community Supported Garden** to be in full swing! Our 140 shareholder families have long finished the strawberries, peas and broccoli of Spring and soon will enjoy Summer fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, peppers and squash which are now ripening. We've received unbelievable coverage in the local press recently (see our website at [www.lavistacsa.org](http://www.lavistacsa.org)). Farmer Kris Larson has done an outstanding job.

The **La Vista Ecological Learning Center** continues its mission of helping to create a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship by offering two discussion series during the Summer. We also look forward to the return in late July of our Earth Literacy graduates for a weekend program entitled "Earth Literacy Revisited". And, of course, the highlight of the year is our weeklong Earth Literacy program August 3-10. We still have a few openings if you'd like to join us on the bluffs this Summer.

This issue contains several articles to enhance your Summer reading. Water is a big part of Summer fun and vacation plans...and of course it is much more. Bishop Michael Pfeifer, OMI, has written many pastoral statements on ecology, and I believe his contribution on water should not be missed. My assistant, Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND, is so excited to also be a participant in several of our discussion series here. She was prompted to put together some of the thinking that has emerged regarding the critical issue of sustainability. Perhaps each of us will be inspired to think and act more sustainably this Summer. Finally, our cover article by Sr. Constance Kozel, RSM, points the way for us to deepen both our consciousness and spirituality to see Earth as sacred. Haven't the mystics of many faiths taught this for centuries?

Enjoy Summer! As we go to the out-of-doors seeking renewal this season, let us remember to give back, thus creating a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship. Our descendants will be grateful to have clean water and a verdant planet in which to seek renewal in Summers hence. 

- Maurice Lange, OMI

## Adjusting

We can't drink the rain anymore  
where I live  
lakes and ponds clear as glass  
flat dead  
our companions the trees shrivel  
no one  
can drink the rain

adjusting  
we humans buy bottled water  
from France  
or Canada or Idaho  
as if that's  
normal  
we adjust  
to rain  
being poison  
rain  
saturating gardens  
rain  
beading on the backs of wood ducks  
rain  
brimming our reservoirs

we can't drink the rain anymore  
where I live  
we adjust  
digging deeper wells  
swallowing more chlorine

remember?  
once clean streams slaked our thirst  
wide and washing rivers even

now we can't drink the rain anymore  
I  
will  
not  
adjust

Marya Grathwohl, OSF

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# Water Is the Earth's Lifeblood

By Bishop Michael Pfeifer, OMI

Modern science tells us that water is the stuff of life; water makes up 75 percent of our bodies and those of most living things. Water unites us in a system at a level perceptible to the senses. Our minds are streams, we say. We talk about "stream of consciousness" experiences, insights, understandings, judgments, feelings, and deliberations. Decisions flow through our bodies and our minds. Water is a religious symbol for the life of grace, of the effect in a person's life of the experience of being in love with God.


Water availability and water quality have become pressing social issues in our West Texas area, throughout the state and nation and world. Waste, drought, overconsumption, greed, pollution, privatization, unjust pricing, and politics all have contributed to convert available fresh water – a common good in creation – into a commodity, and even into a threat to human life, health and economic well-being.

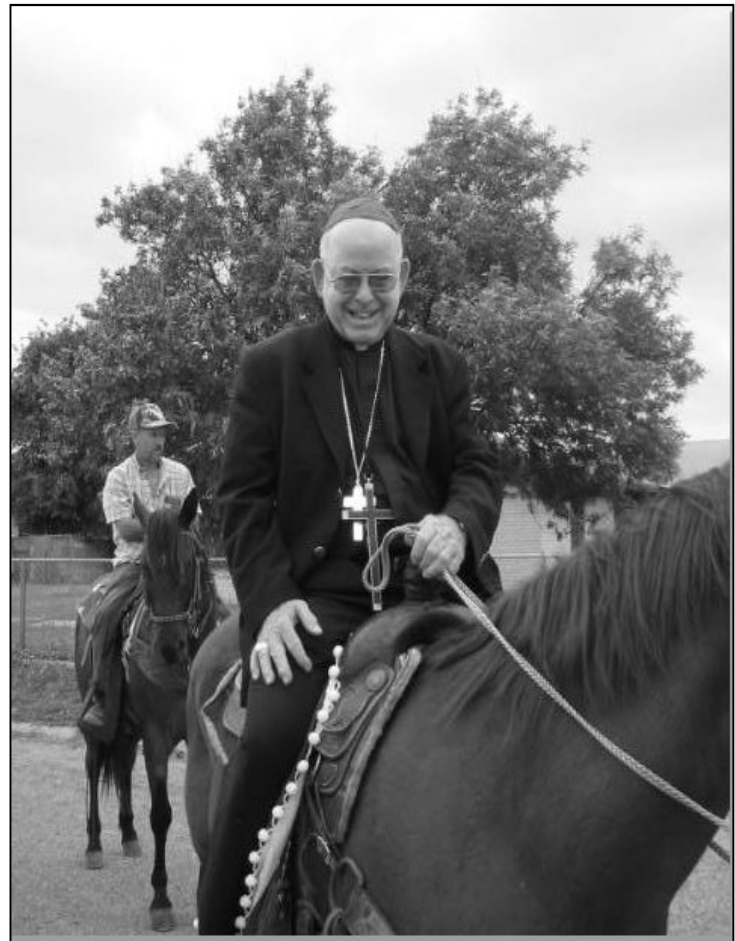
The Catholic bishops state in *Renewing the Earth* (1991) that *"The Christian vision of a sacramental universe is a world that discloses the Creator's presence by visible and tangible signs. Reverence for the Creator present and active in nature, moreover, may serve as ground for environmental responsibility."* A major issue of environmental responsibility is how we care for water and use it, as water is Earth's lifeblood. Water plays an essential role in the web of life and creation, as all of life as we know it depends on water.

Water is indeed Earth's lifeblood. Without water, no life could exist on Earth. With water, life exists, thrives, diversifies and complexifies: water provides life.

On October 18, 2002, the nation celebrated the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the enactment of the Clean Water Act. The goals and objectives of the Clean Water Act call for a commitment to the stewardship of the nation's water and reflect numerous principles of

community action and concern. Water is for the use of all and should be returned to the nations' streams, rivers, lakes, and coasts in a condition that supports life and allows others to use the water for activities that require high water-quality standards. What happens to the water of one community affects others, and we are bound together by a common need to protect the waters.

Protecting and improving the nation's waters is not a short-term activity but a process that requires an ongoing national commitment to environmental stewardship and a water-ethic vision based on sharing and the common good. 



**Michael Pfeifer, OMI**, is bishop of the diocese of San Angelo, Texas. He has written pastoral statements and many articles on ecological issues.

## Choices for Sustainable Living

by Maxine Pohlman, SSND

The journey from non-sustainable to sustainable living can be complicated and daunting; however, it can be made possible with the company of like-spirited folks, good information, and a bit of encouragement along the way. Eleven shareholders in the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista* made these discoveries as we participated a nine-week discussion course entitled “Choices for Sustainable Living.”



*Fr. Maurice and other shareholders enjoy gathering produce on distribution day.*

Being shareholders, we gathered knowing that we had some common ground to stand on. We were already attempting to contribute to a healthy planet by changing the way we purchased food and by the kind of food we were choosing to eat. During our discussions our concept of what it means to live sustainably grew beyond food issues.

We first waded through several definitions of “sustainability” so that we could arrive at a shared understanding of what can be a confusing term. One definition worth sharing was written by Debra Dadd-Redalia in *Sustaining the Earth*:

***“Sustainable means being able to keep going or able to endure; sustainability, then, is acting in such a way that life on Earth endures on into the future, providing for the needs of all citizens and creatures while maintaining the natural functions, resources, and beauty of the planet...Sustainability is rooted in looking to the inherent workings of nature as a model, with the idea that the natural systems of the world do work in balance to perpetuate life, and by working in harmony with those natural systems, we can sustain our own lives.”***

As the course title indicates, we focused on the choices we make in our day-to-day lives. These choices either contribute to a healthy future for the whole Earth community or to the continuing decline of ecosystems, extinction of species, production of mountains of waste, pollution of air and water, and growth of individualism and consumerism.

A good way to get specific about how to live sustainably is by learning from participants in the discussion who have made changes in their own lives. One wise woman carries with her four important questions she asks herself before making any purchase: *Why do I want this? How will I use it? What are my alternatives? Can I get along without it?* She also tries to be aware of WHERE everything comes from that goes through her hands and where it is heading after she has used it. The concept of “pre-cycling” has challenged her to check her purchases in a whole new way. This participant taught me that all of us “vote” with every dollar we spend; so, as consumers, we have a lot of personal power for positively affecting the planet.



**Before making a purchase  
ask yourself these questions:**

***Why do I want this?  
How will I use it?  
What are my alternatives?  
Can I get along without it?***



Another enlightened member now takes note of the beginning destination of the food she wants to purchase and makes her decision based on a clever rating system: if it originates in New Zealand – rarely, Mexico – maybe, California or Colorado – possibly, St. Louis or Godfrey – best of all. In addition, she plans on walking to the grocery store during the summer – sometimes!

One couple reflected that as a result of the course they pay much more attention to what they eat, where their food comes from, how far they drive, what they buy, and the cleaning products they use. They purchase compact fluorescent bulbs now, use cloth bags for shopping, eat very little meat, and try to buy locally. They trust that, as two people living in the highest resource-consuming culture in the world, they can make a difference, especially when joined by others pursuing the same goals.

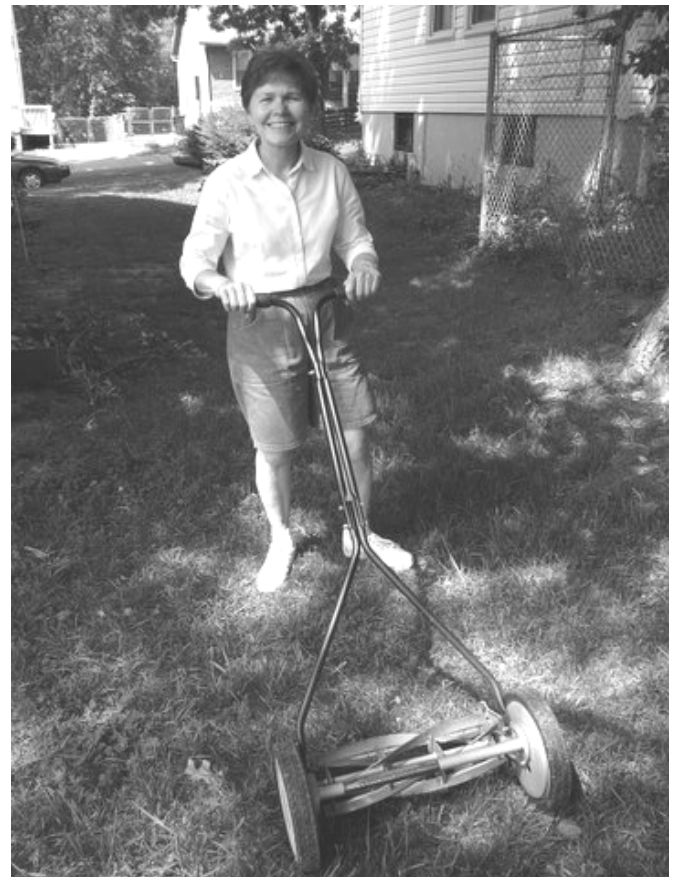
After learning that several members of the course successfully and happily use a reel type push lawn mower, I invested in one also. Even though my neighbor calls from across the street, “That is REALLY old school” each time he sees me mowing, I smile and delight in the fact that I am not polluting, either with gas emissions or noise. Also, I get great exercise!

These examples suggest some steps anyone could take on the journey to sustainability, even as we realize that efforts are also needed on a broader scale. Through the course readings participants learned of many wonderful activities that gave us reasons to hope

for a sustainable future. For example, we read about young architects designing and constructing affordable energy-efficient housing, in some cases even energy-producing housing! Other architects are using recycled materials to build houses. In another article we learned of cities that are building bio-based water and waste treatment plants – ‘living machines’ that recycle water. A final hopeful piece told us about neighborhoods where people co-own tools, take care of one another, and carefully use oneness instead of alienation, separation, and fear-survival. ☯

*If this article has whetted your appetite to learn more about sustainability, I encourage you to contact the source of several of our successful discussion courses - the Northwest Earth Institute ([www.nwei.org](http://www.nwei.org)). You may be inspired to gather a discussion group in your area.*

*For more information on precycling, see the “Naturally Green” web site: [www.halifax.ca/wrms/precycling](http://www.halifax.ca/wrms/precycling).*



**Sister Maxine Pohlman, SSND**, in addition to enjoying yard work and precycling, is Program and Administrative Assistant at **La Vista Ecological Learning Center**.



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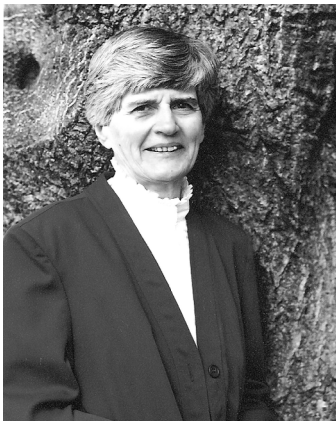
*Sustainability has to be based in spirituality,  
which means using material resources  
with humility and reverence for life and for nature. - Satish Kumar*

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*(continued from page one)*

For Teilhard, the Body of Christ would one day include all things. Christ is progressively drawing all things (the magnetism of which Teilhard speaks) to himself to become the one in whom “all things hold together.” (Col. 1:17.) Our communion consists in what we do (activities) and what we endure (passivities) to help bring this about. To realize this Teilhard urges us to become aware of our evolutionary past. Then we will understand that the entire cosmic movement is going toward Omega—The Christ. ☯

*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest and a paleontologist (1881 - 1955). The title of the article is a quote taken from his book Hymn of the Universe.*



**Constance Kozel** is a member of the Dallas, Pennsylvania Region of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas. She is also a freelance writer and facilitator of workshops and retreats on eco-spirituality.

*There are only a few openings left for our  
2006 Earth Literacy Program!  
Consider joining us!*

## **“Exploring the Sacred Universe”** *August 3-10, \$400*

Come explore Creation’s integrity for a week along the bluffs! As you sit with the wonder, awe and newness of the Universe Story, you will also critically examine the perceptions that currently fashion our cultural world view. Join us for guided activities, insightful instruction, and the opportunity to immerse yourself in the natural world while developing practical skills for a more ecologically-conscious life-style.

**To request a registration form call Fr. Maurice  
at 618-466-5004 or e-mail him at  
lange@omiusa.org.**

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