



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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## Our Children: Their Future

by Thomas Berry, CP

*Thomas Berry is a Passionist priest and geologist whose thought and spirit infuse the programs at La Vista.*

Our children will live not in our world but in their world, a future world that is rapidly taking in its distinctive contours. Our exploitive industrial world, despite all our scientific discoveries is in a state of decline. The long-term survival of our children will depend on a new relationship between the human and the natural worlds. A change is taking place from exploitive relationships to a relationship of mutual enhancement between the natural and the human worlds. The type of prosperity known in the better moments of the twentieth century will never again be available.

A new prosperity, however, will be available. Our children must activate this prosperity in the great variety of human activities. Indeed we ourselves have begun this process.

Already we are aware of the following needs of our children.

### Health and Environment

Our children need a healthy Earth on which to live. A sickened planet is not conducive to healthy children physically, or to emotional or psychic security. They need pure air and water and sunlight and fruitful soil and all those living forms that provide the context in which human existence can be properly nurtured. Only if we provide this context will we fulfill our obligations to our children.

### The Great Society

Our children need to become members not only of a local or even of the human community. They need to become conscious members of that wonderful society of all the living and non-living beings of the natural world about them.

Human society as such is an abstraction. The only real society is the complete society of the natural world. We are awkward at this manner of thinking because our religious as well as our humanist traditions carry a certain antagonism toward the natural world. But now the refusal of human beings to become intimate mem-

bers of the community of Earth is leading to their own destruction. The next generation can survive only as functional members of this larger community. Our children are instinctively aware of this. We need only foster this awareness.

### Food

Our children need to learn gardening. The reasons for this reach deep into their mental and emotional as

well as into their physical survival. Gardening is an active participation in the deepest mysteries of the universe. By gardening our children learn that they constitute with all growing things a single community of life. They learn to nurture and be nurtured in a universe that is always precarious but ultimately benign. They learn profound reasons for the seasonal rituals of the great religious traditions.

More immediately, however, is the question of physical survival. With the ever-increasing loss of soil on which food-growing depends, with the rising inflation in the economic situation, with the need for food grown in the proper organic context, and with the crowded situation in our urban centers, the capacity of our children to grow a significant amount of their own food on



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## Letter from the Director

Happy Autumn to you! The changing of seasons here in the Northern hemisphere brings shorter days, cooler temperatures and longer shadows. We welcome such changes as part of the ever-renewing seasonal cycle and find our selves grateful.

We are grateful for this past August 3-10 and our annual Earth Literacy program "Exploring the Sacred Universe" which hosted a total of 19 people! Heeding Thomas Berry's call to live out of a mutually enhancing human earth relationship, we comprehensively examined our perceptions of where we as a human community find ourselves. Certainly our visions were broadened by the view here at *La Vista* as well as by the awesome vegetarian meals, the content of the program, discussions, outdoor prayer and our geological field trip up the mighty Mississippi!

We are grateful for the opportunity to host other "earthy" events this Autumn into Winter! Please check out our calendar insert in this issue as well as our website [www.lavistaelc.org](http://www.lavistaelc.org)

We are grateful for this sixth season of the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista* and for Farmer Kris Larson and apprentices Nate McKenzie and Stephanie Young! The rain has been more than abundant and at times excessive this year and our farmers have done a wonderful job. Farmer Kris is nearing the end of a three-year covenant with this project and has decided to pursue life elsewhere at the end of this season. We will wish Kris all the best and thank him

## Autumn Equinox, 2008

for taking the farm into new chapters. We are currently engaged in a search for a new head farmer. See the farm's website at [www.lavistacsa.org](http://www.lavistacsa.org)

We are grateful for Thomas Berry and the soft spot in his heart for children - children of all species. He raises the question that shocks our limited vision, "What kind of world will these children inherit?" We center this issue of *La Vista Visions* around the theme of human children and their relationship with the rest of nature. May they and we all enter a process of healing from nature deficit disorder!

Finally, we are grateful for each of our readers. Your support of *La Vista's* work has meant so much to us over these many seasons. May the Autumn you experience evoke a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship! ☉

-Maurice Lange, OMI

Father Maurice  
(second from right) with  
Oblates (left to right) Norm  
Comtois,  
Charlie Gilbert,  
Jacques Lau,  
and Bob Aaron  
during the  
Earth Literacy  
Program.



## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human / Earth Relationship

### 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.*

*These 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.*

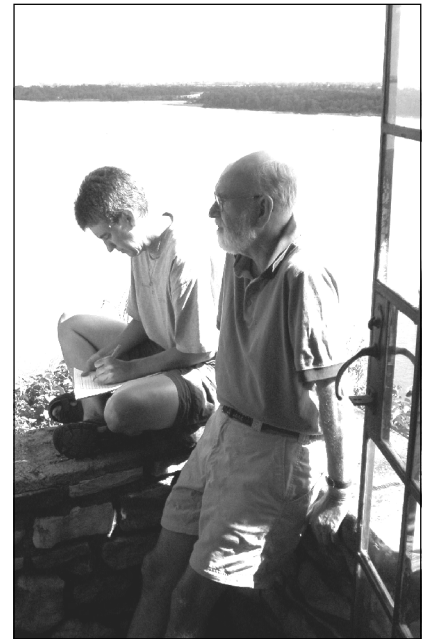
-Thomas Berry, CP



*"Exploring the Sacred Universe" was for me an experiential and integral reflection week that stretched my mind and heart toward a broader and deeper understanding of the cosmos."*

# Earth Literacy 2008

*"The learnings have challenged me to a greater conscious awareness of mutually-enhancing relationships from the beginning to the present."*



*"This program-retreat gave me new energy for building a new order of things, grounded in a heightened awareness that our earth is a 'one-time endowment.' We must preserve and conserve it in trust."*



*"The gift of mystery continues to create 'awe'!"*



*"This week will forever change the way I teach."*



## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GO SCAVENGING AT LA VISTA

by Mary Lapping, OSU



The Summer Solstice this year occurred on a bright and sunny day, perfect for our group of high school students and their mentors to go to *La Vista* to explore ways to deepen their appreciation for their bioregion by immersing themselves in nature.

Who were these students? Motivated by the belief that the future of our planet rests with youth, the *St. Louis Inter-community Ecological Council of Women Religious* launched a new initiative to work with young women in their own community-sponsored schools. Thus, the *Inter-School Ecological Council* was formed at the beginning of 2008 with representatives from four participating schools: Nerinx Hall, St Joseph's Academy, Ursuline Academy and Villa Duchesne.

The purposes of this Inter-School Council include: **raising awareness of issues related to ecological crises, educating for sustainable practices, acting for justice on behalf of all creation, and recognizing the spiritual foundations of care for Earth.** The students who participate in the Council are those who are eager to make a difference in themselves, their schools, their communities, and the world regarding the ecological crisis. They are committed to meeting once a month to share information/ideas and to design projects that will be beneficial to their schools. During this first year we considered significant topics such as vegetarianism, rain forest education, and extinction of species. In the short time we have been meeting we planned and executed several good projects: Earth Day announcements for each school, a concert for the benefit of the Missouri Coa-

lition for the Environment and a school in Kenya, and finding out what is being done in other area schools to protect and care for Earth.

During an evaluation meeting one particularly avid student suggested that we meet during the summer; so, an exciting event was held at *La Vista Ecological Learning Center* in conjunction with Summer Solstice on June 21<sup>st</sup>. Fr. Maurice Lange, OMI, and Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND, were wonderful hosts and presenters for the day called *Learning To Live in Our Bioregion*. We began in the morning by introducing ourselves and sharing with the group an example of how we have met God in our natural environment. This was a very rich sharing and one that immediately brought out our common bonds.

We then moved to the top of the bluff where Fr. Maurice led us in a Prayer of the Four Directions, using our bodies to pray and to take in the beauty of the *La Vista* setting.

Sr. Maxine had prepared a very creative way for us to enter into the theme of the day, which was getting to know the local area a little better and becoming better acquainted with the term "bioregion." She said that deepening our sense of place helps us to REALLY live where we are, familiar with the many components that make up the bioregion. Knowing a bioregion helps us to make choices that enhance the life of all, the human as well as the other-than-human species in the area.

She named the bioregion where we were—"Meeting of the Great Rivers"—since *La Vista* is very near the confluence of the Missouri, the Illinois, and the Mississippi Rivers. After explaining a bit about bioregionalism in general, Sr. Maxine introduced us to a fun way to get better acquainted with the bioregion at





*La Vista*. She gave us directions - which included a very helpful map of the property - for a Bioregional Scavenger Hunt. We paired up and set off, maps in hand, to find at least two members of the bioregion. And so we learned about the creek, the pond, the crow's nest, jack-in-the-pulpit, the serviceberry tree, and many other members of the Earth Community on the bluffs. At each site, we found a sheet of paper giving us background information. Using that as a resource, we made a sketch and decided what we wanted to share with the group about our particular bioregional aspect, as well as what we thought human beings could learn from it.



After an hour we reassembled and shared with each other all that we had learned about the features we explored. There were some very creative and interesting stories to share about the screech owl, the white-tailed deer and the green dragon!

About noon we gathered at the Lodge overlooking the great Mississippi where we shared a tasty, mostly organic lunch prepared by various members of the organizing team. We felt that one of the important elements of the day was to prepare a healthy and delicious meal, using as many local ingredients as was possible. We even had some solar oven-cooked rice! Each person who brought a dish had an opportunity to introduce her dish to the group, as is the custom at *La Vista*.

The afternoon found us wandering in the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista*, doing scavenging of a different kind. Strawberries had just been harvested, and Fr. Maurice regrettably announced that there were no more. But wait! Just a few skeptics proved him wrong, and the hunt was on. Anyone who was lucky enough to find one still hanging on got to taste the unbelievable sweetness of these fresh berries. We were able to enjoy them all the more knowing that no chemicals had contaminated these strawberries!



After our tour of the organic garden and its greenhouse, we gathered under the shade of several tall trees and talked more about how to make local, organic food choices. Sr. Maxine gave us an excerpt from Barbara Kingsolver's book *Small Wonder* which encouraged responsible eating by making us aware of the power implicit in our food choices. We had time only for the briefest discussion of this very worthwhile article. It will certainly be something to which we can return for further education.

At the end of a very full day we left for home having been enriched with nourishment for our spirits, our bodies and our minds. ☯



**Sr. Mary Lapping, OSU**, a member of the Ursuline Sisters of St. Louis, Missouri, is a founding member of the Inter-School Ecological Council. She serves as the coordinator of her Congregation's Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation Office.



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***“Only when the child  
is able to identify  
its own center  
with the center  
of the universe  
does education  
really begin.”***

*- Maria Montessori*



Visit us at [www.lavistaELC.org](http://www.lavistaELC.org) & [www.lavistaCSA.org](http://www.lavistaCSA.org)

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very limited areas of Earth will become an increasing urgency.

Elementary education especially might very well begin and be developed in a gardening context. How much the children could learn! A language related to life! Emotional responses to blossoming and fruitful plants, social cooperation, death as a source of life. They could learn geology and biology and astronomy. They could learn the sources of poetry and literature and the arts. They might even be saved from the sterile and ephemeral world of video games.

### **Revelatory Experience**

Our children need to understand the meaning and grandeur and sacredness of the Earth as revelatory of the deep mysteries and meaning of the world. Rather than teaching them to disdain the natural world as unworthy of their concern, it would be most helpful if our religious traditions would move toward a stronger emphasis on the glorious phenomena of the universe about us as modes of divine communication.

In a special manner our children need to observe and esteem the spontaneities of nature in our own bioregions here in the different areas of North America; spontaneities that give expression to genetic diversity which is the most precious endowment of the living world. Without the marvelous variety of living forms that swim in the sea and live and move upon the earth and fly through the air,

our own human understanding, our emotional life, our imaginative powers, our sense of the divine, our capacity for verbal expression; these would all be terribly diminished. If we lived on the moon our sense of the divine would reflect the lunar landscape; our emotions, sensitivities and imagination would all in a similar manner be limited to a lunar mode of expression. So with our children, they are what they are and have such remarkable expansion of life because of that share in the natural world that they have here on the North American continent. The radiance of the surroundings is even now reflected in the radiance of our children's countenances.

### **America**

As this country has often been the leader in the great industrial-technological experiment that has been taking place in these past two centuries and as this country has suffered from the devastation consequent on the petrochemical period through which we have passed, so now we might well become the leaders in guiding the children of the world toward this more splendid future that is presently in the making. If we can see only the aurora; they, hopefully, will see the dawn. ☯

The Oblate Ecological Initiative  
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