



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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Summer 2014
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Monarchs and Us

by Virginia Nesmith

For much of my life, I have worked for the rights of farm workers. Most farm workers in the US are immigrants who have risked their lives to cross the border between the US and Mexico, sacrificing everything in order to provide for their families.

That's one reason I was drawn to the film, "The Flight of the Butterflies" which is about another cross border migration - that of the Monarch butterfly. The movie tells the story of Canadian scientist Fred Urquhart who, with help from his wife Norah and colleagues in Mexico, was the first to track the amazing journey of the Monarch. The butterflies are so light that fifty of them together weigh less than ounce! Yet they fly up to 2800 miles from Canada and the US to their winter home in the fir forests of Michoacán, Mexico.

I left the movie in awe of this tiny creature which I had previously known only for its beauty as it flitted through fields and gardens. These bi and tri-national Monarchs have a life span of eight to nine months. After spending the winter in a semi-dormant state in Mexico's hospitable climate, they return to the US in the spring to reproduce, laying their eggs on milkweed before they die. Their offspring live only about a month. Several breeding cycles and many miles later, this super-generation is born in the Northern US and Southern Canada; from there they make the long trip back south, ensuring the survival of the species. So far.

While there are no kidnappers or border control agents to stop them, Monarchs face their own human induced perils including deforestation in Mexico and the dramatic loss of milkweed in the United States along with recent severe weather patterns. The results are drastic. The Monarch colonies east of the Rockies are best measured by the area they cover after landing in Mexico's Butterfly Biosphere Reserve. In the winter of 1996-'97, monarch colonies covered 45 acres of forest. In 2013-'14 they covered only 1.7 acres, plummeting to their lowest density ever recorded.

Though the Monarchs' decline has been underway for some time, this year's numbers sounded an alarm. Newspapers nationwide are writing about what scientists call, this "endangered phenomenon". When the Presidents of the US and Mexico and the Cana-

dian Prime Minister met last February, the Monarch and the need for international collaboration on the issue made it onto their agenda! Mexico is responsible for the logging that threatens the twelve mountain peaks to which Monarchs find their way.

The Mexican Government and NGO's such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) have taken increasingly aggressive steps to stop the deforestation, through greater enforcement of a ban on logging, the development of alternative industries to employ community members, and other measures. Progress is being made. "A year and a half ago we saw that large scale logging had been reduced to practically zero", said Omar Vidal, president of WWF-Mexico.



Photo courtesy of the Missouri Department of Conservation

Now, the focus is on US agricultural practices which are considered the most egregious threat to the Monarch. Monarchs can't survive without milkweed. The female lays its eggs on milkweed and the hatched larvae grow into caterpillars that feed only on the milkweed; its leaves contain a poison that inoculates the Monarch from predators. Over 100 varieties of milkweed used to flourish in fields and along roadsides; now millions of acres have been lost. Scientists cite several reasons, primarily the huge expansion of genetically modified crops in the Midwest bred to be resistant to herbicides such as Monsanto's Round

Up, which kill everything else in and alongside the fields. Pesticides and herbicides are also killing the wild flowers on the migratory path which adult monarchs feed on.

Saving the Monarch will take all of us. Gardeners, students, and faith communities are encouraged to plant milkweed and "citizen scientists" can tag and track the Monarchs. But, according to pollination expert Gary Nabhan, this is a huge system problem and will take everyone to make up such a large scale loss. We need to bring together conservationists and farmers, biologists, highway mowers and utility companies. We need diversity of community, of crops, of wildlife. Nabhan and colleagues are demonstrating this in his home town of Patagonia, Arizona where 160 of the town's 800 residents are

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Letter from the Editor

Summer 2014

Some weeks ago during a discussion session on the interface between science and religion, the topic of trans-humanism came up. This movement imagines the possibility that the human condition will be transformed by technologies, enhancing human capacities, overcoming fundamental human limitations. Trans-humanists predict that humans in the future may be able to transform themselves into beings with greatly expanded abilities, deeming us worthy of the name "post-human." As evidence participants in the group pointed to the way that technology is truly changing the human brain and human activities, often in less than appealing ways. Most of us were not enthusiastic about this possibility.

I mulled this over for a few days when I came upon a quote by Abraham Heschel calling human beings to "a persistent effort to be worthy of the name 'human'". I breathed a sigh of relief, for this resonated within me unlike the specter of a "post human" and encouraged me in my ministry here at La Vista. After all, what does it mean to be human on a planet where technological change is so rapid we forget that life is naturally slow? Seasons change slowly, humans mature slowly, the sun rises and sets slowly, our hair grays slowly. How does a human align with life amidst such paradox?

In his book *Enough: Staying Human in an Engineered Age*, author Bill McKibben proposes that one thing making us uniquely human is our ability to say "enough", to set limits to our behaviors, to curtail the impulse to over-extend our reach, to limit ourselves in deference to others – humans and other members of the Earth community. McKibben notes, "we cannot forever grow in reach and power – we must at last learn how to say, 'Enough'".

La Vista is a great place to contemplate what it means to be human and to say "enough". Years ago the Missionary Oblates set an example of human curtailment by selling the development rights to this land, providing a home for oak, hickory, sugar maple, squirrel, white-tailed deer and red fox. It was no small gesture to sacrifice possible monetary gain in favor of preserving the land forever. The Missionary Oblates Woods Nature Preserve ensures nesting places for bald eagles and creates a contiguous land tract with neighboring Olin Nature Preserve and the Mississippi Sanctuary, forming a forest large enough that different species can find mates and food for survival. Truly, when humans say "enough", other species benefit.

The page one article by Virginia Nesmith also calls us to be worthy of the name human as we widen our circle of compassion to include the threatened monarch butterfly. To learn more about our effort to provide milkweed for migrating monarchs, I invite you to join us for our Autumn Equinox celebration. (See page four.)

Wherever you live on this rare and precious planet, thank you for persisting in your efforts to be worthy of the name "human". All species will benefit!

For La Vista,
Maxine Pohlman,
SSND



Red fox at home at La Vista.

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

PLANT NATIVE MILKWEED in your yard for the Monarch egg and larvae, as well as flowering plants for the adult Monarch to feed on. Encourage your school, or house of worship to participate, too.

Check with a nursery in your area that sells native plants to determine which are the best varieties for your area and for planting times. Be sure to buy organic!

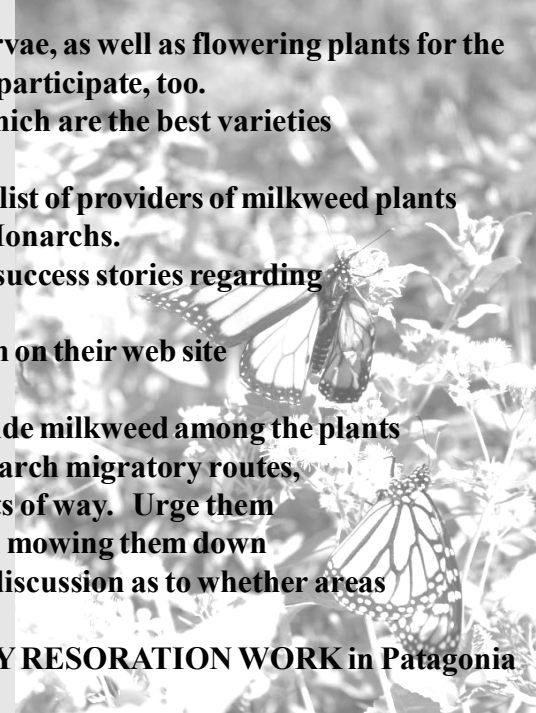
VISIT MONARCH WATCH (www.monarchwatch.org) which provides a list of providers of milkweed plants and seeds and information on becoming a "citizen scientist" who tracks Monarchs.

GO TO www.makewayformonarchs.org to read articles by experts; find success stories regarding pollinators; and view a calendar of lectures and events in various areas.

WATCH "FLIGHT OF THE BUTTERFLIES" and find more information on their web site www.flightofthebutterflies.com.

WRITE LOCAL AND STATE LEGISLATORS. Encourage them to include milkweed among the plants that are seeded along highway roadsides, especially those that follow monarch migratory routes, and to set aside larger tracts for milkweed, such as parks and utility rights of way. Urge them to manage highway roadsides so that they are wildlife friendly, rather than mowing them down or spraying with herbicides. If you are connected with farmers, start the discussion as to whether areas on the sides of the fields can remain unsprayed.

READ MORE ABOUT THE POLLINATOR AND FOOD COMMUNITY RESORATION WORK in Patagonia and surrounding areas at www.borderlandsrestoration.org.



Exploring the Sacred Universe: Earth Literacy Program August 3 – 10, 2014

We need a common and compelling vision of the nature of the universe and the role of the human within it . . . Only such a vision has a chance of awakening the deep psychic energies necessary to shape a new era of health, well-being, and true prosperity.

- Brian Swimme

YOU ARE INVITED to ponder and experience the significance
of the Sacred Universe Story
as a new transforming context for your life!

The goal of our program is to empower participants to integrate intellectual understandings with the primary experience of the natural world as one in distress, needing our attention and activism. This process is supported by reflection, journalling, field trip, environmental art, ritual, and stimulating discussion along with a local, seasonal and vegetarian diet.

Presenters include: Norman Comtois, OMI; Maxine Pohlman, SSND; Sharon Zayac, OP; Paulette Zimmerman, SSND; Chrissy McAllister; and Annie Kelley, our amazing chef.

Scholarships are available, and there is still time to register.

Call 618-466-5004 and request a registration form or e-mail your request to info@lavistaelc.org.
For more information: www.lavistaelc.org. Cost: \$550.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

JUNE

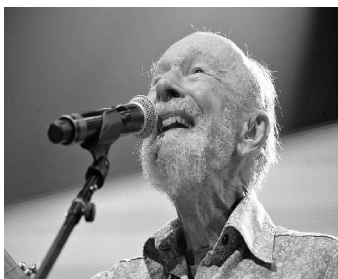
Celebrating the Summer Solstice with a Pete Seeger Sing-along Saturday, June 21 5:00 – 8:30 PM

Pete Seeger, who passed last February, was an American folk musician and engaged activist who supported international disarmament, civil rights and ecological awareness. He wrote hits like *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* *Turn, Turn, Turn, This Land is Your Land* and *If I Had a Hammer*.

On this longest day of the year, it is fitting that we take time to honor this man of integrity as we promote the integrity of creation. Led by St. Louis musicians Charlie Nesmith and Michael Levine we'll sing the Seeger classics as well as others he popularized. Join us for part of the evening or the whole shebang as we enjoy the beautiful bluffs, the summer season, and the man who loved music, people and our rare and precious planet.

5:00 – 6:00 View "The Power of Song" a documentary of Seeger's life
6:00 – 7:00 Potluck Supper
7:00 – 8:30 Sing-along

Please bring a lawn chair, covered dish, your voice, guitar, banjo, and



anything else you'd like to contribute!

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 and leave your name and number attending.

Donations according to means to thank our musicians are gratefully accepted.

JULY

The Emergence of the Universe and the Emerging Earth Community Educational DVD Series Second and fourth Monday of each month beginning 8/25 (ten sessions) 7:00 – 8:30 pm

In a series of one-on-one interviews, contributions of ecology, economics, agriculture, urban living, poetry and art, psychology, race and religion, are explored with the goal of creating new human/Earth relations. Scenes from the film, *Journey of the Universe*, are woven together with interviews that discuss ways in which we are creating vibrant and sustainable societies and cultures within the context of our epic universe story. Each session includes two interviews with discussion following each.

Registration: Call 618-466-5004.

Cost: Donations according to means are gratefully accepted.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

AUGUST

Herbal Medicine Cabinet Workshop **Sunday, August 24, 1:30 – 4:30 pm**

Building a natural home medicine cabinet is a good starting point from which to explore the healing power of herbs! Join our farmers Eric and Crystal Stevens and discover how to stock your medicine cabinet with homemade herbal remedies. You will learn how to make tinctures, teas, and herbal first aid balm. Workshop includes demonstrations, PowerPoint presentation, and herb walk (weather permitting).

Registration: Please complete the registration form and send it with your payment to LaVista by Friday, August 22.

Cost: \$15.

SEPTEMBER

Celebrating the Autumn Equinox and the Fall Monarch Migration **Saturday, September 20, 2:00 – 4:00 pm**

The change of season causes amazing monarch butterflies to begin their annual fall migration. However, the number of migrating monarchs is plummeting for a few reasons: widespread loss of milkweed, which their young rely on for food; extreme climate fluctuations in North America, including freezing temperatures and heavy rain; and deforestation. What can we do to help?

Join us for a time of consciousness raising, celebration, and a community planting of milkweed seeds on the beautiful land at La Vista!

Please bring a lawn chair and a snack to share.

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 and leave your name and the number attending.

Freewill donations of \$5 - \$10 gratefully accepted.

OCTOBER

Creating a Climate for Solidarity: Exploring the Climate Crisis in the Spirit of St. Francis of Assisi **Monday, October 6, 7:00 – 8:30 pm**

St. Francis's compassion was comprehensive, embracing sun, moon, birds, wolves, and suffering human beings. In his spirit we will explore how the climate crisis impacts the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, communities and ecosystems. Join us as we examine this reality through video testimonials and group reflection process.

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 and leave your name and the number attending.

Freewill donations gratefully accepted.

Green Notes from an Architect: Thoughts from the Heartland **Saturday, October 11 6:30 – 8:00 pm**

John Guenther, FAIA, LEED AP, has produced a distinguished body of architecture contributing to a built environment that is sustainable. John will share thoughts and lessons learned from some of his amazing projects including:

Albericci Headquarters, - the highest rated LEED Platinum building in the world in 2004; a new City Hall for Wildwood, MO, LEED Gold; an Environmental Plan for the City of Wildwood, MO, leading to cutting-edge environmental regulations and a master plan to help protect the new city's 67 square mile area; Principia College Science Center; an addition to Bernard Maybeck's Watson Labs (1934-35); Bonebright Residence, a passive solar home at the Lake of the Ozarks; Central Institute for the Deaf, St. Louis, MO - a high performing, acoustically sensitive learning environment; and the Raccoon Club, a children's lookout tower.



Held in the rustic lodge at La Vista.

Registration: Call (618)-466-5004 and leave your name and the number attending.

Cost: Donation according to means is appreciated.

Exploring the Sacred Universe Earth Literacy Weekend **at Our Lady of the Prairie Retreat, Wheatland, Iowa** **Oct. 17 – 19**

Through ritual, presentations, conversation, DVD, and activities, we will ponder the Universe Story as one of our sacred origin stories and consider its profound implications for us as human beings on a planet in distress.

Presenter: Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Registration and details: Contact Rae Elwood, CHM 563-336-8414. Visit online at www.chiowa.org/prairie.php

NOVEMBER

Outdoor Cooking with La Vista's Farmers/Chefs **Sunday, November 2, 3:30 - 6:30 pm**

Join our farmers Eric and Crystal Stevens at beautiful La Vista for outdoor cooking, eating and camaraderie! We will visit the Garden to gather ingredients and then prepare an entire meal using a grill and cob oven. We'll make appetizers, grill wood-fired pizza, blend a delicious salad, and cook a mouth-watering Dutch oven apple cobbler on the coals.

Bring your friends, immerse yourself in autumn beauty at La Vista's community garden, and enjoy a relaxing Saturday.

Registration: Please complete the registration form and send it with your payment to La Vista by Friday, October 24th.

Cost: \$20 per person

Please complete this form and send it with your payment to the address below.

Event Title: _____ Date(s) _____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Street City State Zip

E-mail: _____ I have enclosed a check for: _____

Your confirmation will be sent through e-mail.

Return to: La Vista Ecological Learning Center 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035

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We are grateful for your support through donations or service.

- To continue receiving La Vista Visions Newsletter please mail your donation of \$10 to the address above.
- If you would like to receive La Vista Visions electronically, please make that request by emailing us at info@lavistaelc.org.
- To make a donation to support the Great Work of La Vista, please mail your check to the address above.
- To volunteer at La Vista, please call Sister Maxine at 618-466-5004.



Saturday, December 6, 10:00 am - 4:00 pm

During this sacred time, we will reflect on the impact that major shifts in our understanding of the Universe have on our images of God. The focus will be on how we perceive God's action within a Universe that is evolving, alive and dynamic. The day includes presentations, sharing, and pondering together the Mystery of God in our lives.

Helen Cahill, D.Min. is a Dominican Sister of Peace serving on the staff at the Claret Center Resources for Counseling and Spiritual Direction in Chicago. Helen also offers spiritual direction, gives directed retreats, supervises formation personnel and offers workshops on a variety of topics. She is an adjunct faculty member at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago.



Held at Maria Center, on the SSND Campus at 320 East
Ripa Avenue, St. Louis, MO 63125

Please bring a lunch. We'll provide drinks.
Cost: \$35 OR \$30 if you register by Nov. 21.

Registration: Please complete the registration form and send it with your payment to La Vista. Confirmation will be sent via e-mail.

Co-sponsored with SSND JPIC Office.

Celebrate the Winter Solstice
Saturday, December 20, 7:00 – 9:00 pm

On this festive night, the longest one of the year, we mark life's forward progress as we yet again travel around the sun together. This celebration is one of merriment, delicious holiday treats, solstice carols and recommitment to caring for our precious home planet.

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 and leave your name and the number attending.

Please bring a treat to share.
Donation according to means is appreciated.

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**Offering
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consciously
within the
integrity of Creation.**

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is a ministry of the
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.**

Visit us at www.lavistaELC.org & www.lavistaCSA.org
or on **Facebook**: www.facebook.com/EcologicalLearningCenter

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engaged in restoring water flow and pollinators.

Bees, pollinators which are critical to our food supply, are under great duress and a number of migratory species worldwide are in trouble. We could easily make a list of threats to our land, water, and air, all of them important. But my priorities have been the rights of people, the men, women and children suffering from injustice and abuse. It's taken the Monarch to convince me of the value of the holistic approach of the Oblates and other religious communities to Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

Without those phenomena which speak to us of the majesty and mystery of God – a tiny butterfly traveling thousands of miles, the view of millions of stars in the night sky, the whisper of pines in the forest, we can't be whole enough to address the suffering we encounter. It is only by marveling at the complexity and beauty of the universe that I can work with any hope for a gentler society, one that respects the needs of people and of butterflies to cross borders freely. The Monarch has renewed my spirit, enabling me to share in the vision articulated at a talk given by Gary Nabhan in March. It is from the poem "All will Come Again" by Rainer Marie Rilke.

*All will come again into its strength:
the fields undivided, the waters undammed,
the trees towering and the walls built low.*

And in the valleys, people as strong and varied as the land.

Virginia Nesmith recently retired from a fifteen year tenure as Executive Director of the National Farm Worker Ministry (NFWM). Virginia graduated from Webster University with a degree in Peace and Conflict Studies and later studied in the Master of Divinity Program at Eden Seminary. She began her work with National Farm Worker Ministry in Florida in 1976. She has also served as Director of the St. Louis Economic Conversion Project and as the St. Louis Public Action Manager for the United Farm Workers America.



Go to page two to find out what you can do for the Monarchs.

