



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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If We Have Eyes That See. . .

by James Profit, SJ

Ah...I have arrived! It felt like home! I had just spent two hours on the road dealing with traffic. The streets were grey from the mixture of that once white snow, and salt, applied supposedly, to make my travel easier. Coming near to my destination, I suddenly got a glimpse of the lake. Not able to resist the urge to have a closer look, I took a sudden right and went down to the edge of the lake. I leapt out of the car, and stood facing the lake, with the city to my back. Here I savoured what was before me...a horizon without land, the cool breeze on my face, the quiet sound of small waves hitting the shore, the smell of the damp air. The burden of my city driving lifted; a calmness and peace came over me. I experienced intimacy with God. I had come home!

After several moments on the shore, I slowly returned to the car, and eventually reached my destination. I was late for my appointment, but there are more important things than being on time! Though I can no longer remember the purpose of the appointment, I do remember well the experience on the lakeshore.

Returning Home

A Native elder once told me that the land of our birth, if it truly was our home, will always draw us back because it has formed us; it has created us. I return home not only to visit family; I go to be nourished by the land, the air, and the sea. It is not only the land of our birth but similar landscapes as well, that draw us, calling us to experience our connectedness again.

Lack of "at-homeness" with the Earth

Our industrial and urban lifestyles do not easily facilitate an experience of being at home with the earth. Even persons

living in rural areas have grown more distant from the earth. I have heard it said, perhaps somewhat facetiously, that one can measure a farmer's attachment to the land in reverse proportion to the size of the tractor.

Some of us have a dualistic relationship with the land. We live our "normal" lives and then escape to "be in nature" to become rejuvenated. With such a relationship we receive an incomplete and therefore romantic experience of nature. It lacks true intimacy which involves suffering, death and rebirth.



Could this lack of intimacy or feeling at home with the earth explain why we are destroying our home, the earth, with our rampant consumerism and greed? Each year, more than 20,000 species of life forms become extinct – species which are unique expressions of the creator as we humans

are. Each day, 115 square miles of rainforest are destroyed, and 71 tons of topsoil lost to erosion.

Meanwhile, 841 million people continue to suffer from malnutrition and hunger. Recently, the Intergovernmental Panel on climate change, a group of over 500 scientists from all over the world, warned us that we can no longer deny the scientific evidence that the earth is warming (global warming) and that we humans are responsible for this ecological crisis.

War with the Earth

Our indifference to the suffering of the earth and other life species can only be explained by our detachment from, and indifference to, the earth. In our industrialized culture, we are at war with the earth.

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Letter from the Director

Happy Summer from *La Vista*! Images of vacation, growth, fruitfulness, swimming, and ripe tomatoes come to mind when I ponder the season. What do you relate to Summer?

Land. Getting out on the land is what I especially enjoy this time of year: gardening, hiking, camping, biking. Sometimes when I do any of these slowly enough, the constant communion of the landscape and its myriad species fills me with awe and gratitude. The land immerses me and corrects a mindset that I am subjected to otherwise constantly: that "the land is a collection of objects waiting to be fashioned into consumer items".

How do we view land? Is land a commodity to be developed or a communion event to be entered into? In the Spring issue of *La Vista Visions* we honored Rachel Carson's work and focused on the extinction of species. In this Summer issue we take up the subject and subjectivity of land.

Obviously the viability of species is tied up with how we humans decide to relate to land. Aldo Leopold coined the term "**land ethic**" in his 1949 work "*A Sand County Almanac*". This ethic is based upon the understanding that "*a thing is right only when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the community; and the community includes the soil, water, fauna and flora, as well as the people*", it is wrong when it tends to not preserve the community. What could be simpler?!

The **Community Supported Garden at La Vista** works diligently to build up the community of soil, water, flora, fauna and people. As the Garden hits its stride in this its 5th Summer the harvests have been wonder-filled. We shareholders receive from the land gratefully, Farmer Kris gives back to the land with compost, cover crop-

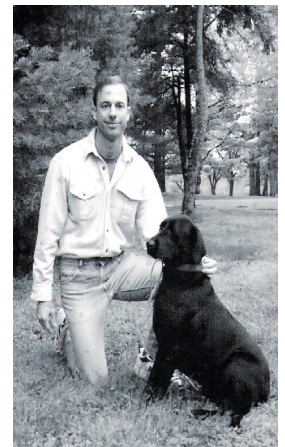
ping and letting sections lay fallow.

La Vista Ecological Learning Center is also bearing fruit! We could not accommodate another person during our *Silent Spring* retreat this past April! The *Earth Literacy* program this coming August is also full! These large numbers of participants and retreatants come here, ponder the Sacred Story of the Universe and see with new eyes how the landscape here and back home emerged over geologic time. They leave this land with broadened vision and an expanded sense of community.

As you go out onto the land this Summer...slow down and allow the Great Communion event going on all around you to wash over you. You are one of innumerable species in an interdependent, interconnected web of life. In what ways might you grow this Summer into a mutually-enhancing relationship with land, with Earth? ☯

-Maurice Lange, OMI

Magpie (2000-2007) and Maurice. Magpie was a lover of the pastures, woods, and bluffs of La Vista. A friend to everyone who visited and companion since the start of the Ecological Initiative, she will be missed by all.



Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/ Earth Relationship

Land: Summertime Viewing, Browsing, and Reading

- "***Earth and the American Dream***" is a beautiful, disturbing, moving, and highly-recommended film offering viewers a compelling sense of how the land of this continent was abused to make the American dream come true. You can purchase it online at www.directcinemalimited.com.
- The mission of the ***Religious Lands Conservancy Project*** is to bring religious communities and land conservationists together. To learn much more, visit the website of *Crystal Spring Earth Learning Center* by googling "Religious Lands Conservancy."
- The ***Land Trust Alliance*** promotes voluntary land conservation and strengthens the land trust movement by providing the leadership, information, skills, and resources land trusts need to conserve land for the benefit of communities and natural systems. To find a Land Trust Organization in your area, visit www.lta.org.
- In his book ***Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*** Richard Louv reminds us that not only can nature teach kids science and nurture their creativity, but nature needs its children if it is to have a viable future!

Yard Work - An Alternative View

God: (Overheard in a Conversation between God and St. Francis of Assisi)

Francis, you know all about gardens and nature; what in the world is going on in the U.S.? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistles and the stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought, and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honeybees, and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of color by now. All I see are patches of green.

summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

St. Francis:

You aren't going to believe this, but when the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it then pay to get rid of it.

St. Francis:

It's the tribes that settled there called People-Who-Love-Lawns. They started calling your flowers "weeds", and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

God:

Grass? But it is so boring. It's not even colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, bees, or birds, only grubs and sod worms. It's temperamental with temperatures. Do these People-Who-Love Lawns really want grass growing there?

St. Francis:

Apparently not! As soon as it has grown a little, they cut it; sometimes two times a week.

God:

They cut it? Do they bale it like hay?

St. Francis:

Not exactly. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

God:

They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

St. Francis:

Just the opposite! They pay to throw it away.

God:

Now let me get this straight. They fertilize it to make it grow, but when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

St. Francis:

Youbetcha.

God:

These People-Who-Love-Lawns must be relieved in the

Countercultural Suggestions from St. Francis:

#1. Bring back diversity! Reduce your lawn by 25%.

#2. Replace with drought-tolerant native trees, shrubs, flowers and groundcover.

God:

What nonsense! At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the Spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the Autumn they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep the moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. Plus, as they rot, the leaves become compost to enhance the soil. It's a natural circle of life.

St. Francis:

You'd better sit down for this one! As soon as the leaves fall, the People-Who-Love-Lawns rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

God:

No way! What do they do to protect the shrubs and tree roots in the winter, to keep the soil moist and loose?

St. Francis:

After throwing the leaves away, they go out and buy something called mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

God:

And where do they get this mulch?

St. Francis:

They cut down the trees and grind them up to make mulch.

God:

Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. Let's go sit in the shade, have a glass of water, read the Summer issue of La Vista Visions, and get some hope-filled ideas. (author unknown; adapted)

(If We Have Eyes That See... continued from page 1)

The declaration of war became clear to me recently when I was reading a farm newspaper. I came upon an ad for a herbicide called Ultimax, produced by Dupont. It had a beautiful blue sky in the background, and red barns far off in the distance. A field with 5 inch high corn was in the foreground. It was a beautiful pastoral view, except for one thing. In the center of the photo there was an army tank pulling a pesticide sprayer. The caption underneath the photo stated, "Just how badly do you want your weeds gone?"

In our assault on nature, we continue to find "solutions" to the problems of our industrial age by the same form of linear thinking which has brought us to where we are today. This thinking is so unlike the cyclic model that nature gives us.



The land at Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph

As an example of this linear thinking, we have come to understand the beautiful white snow on our streets and roads as a "problem." We solve this problem by applying different chemicals and then we fail to see the environmental consequences of our solution as a problem. Biotechnology, more pesticides, in vitro fertilization, nuclear power, drilling for more oil in the seas and national parks, wider highways are all promoted as solutions to other problems. Yet, if we have eyes that see, we have to see that we have come to a dead end.

Healing the Earth

The earth is in crisis, and many of our old ways of being and acting are simply not working. Our very survival as an earth community and human family depends on a drastic change of lifestyle which includes a different way of thinking, a different way of being with the earth. All of this needs to happen immediately.

The need for quick action is great but there is no need for despair. While there are many signs of the death resulting from our war on the earth, there are also many signs of the life-producing healing springing from the earth. The life force within Mother Earth cannot be suppressed easily and she continues to find ways to heal herself. Sometimes, we humans, a part of the earth, are also part of the healing that is happening. The younger generation would seem much more aware of, and concerned about this ecological crisis.

A number of people are becoming more concerned about climate change and are beginning to make changes in their lives. Recently, I was one of 1500 participants attending a weekend organic agricultural conference, in contrast with

about 75 participants in the mid-1980s. Community gardens are springing up in abandoned lots. We are beginning to see more discussion of alternative energy forms such as wind and solar power. Obviously, the agri-chemical companies behind the biotech industry are on the defensive with prospects of a decrease in their profits.

Ecological Movement in Religious Congregations

Many members of religious congregations are exercising leadership in the eco-

logical movement as a whole, and leading it in the church. This is an expression of the earth's healing, a healing that every religious needs to join.

There is much about our life that can help us be nurturers and healers of the earth, rather than lieutenants of war upon it. In our commitment to a spiritual journey, we need to rediscover the earth as our home, especially that part of the earth on which we live. In our resting in the quiet presence of the creator, we can allow the physical/spiritual earth to form our spirit.

We are invited to discover the truth by allowing "the animals...the birds of the air...the plants of the earth...the fish of the sea" to teach us as Job 12 reminds us. We need to experience the natural and spiritual cycle of life, death and resurrection. Our spiritual journey is a coming home to the oneness of creation, the Holy One.

Hope and Humility

As religious, we are comfortable with the reality of mystery. We allow ourselves to be inspired by its call beyond ourselves. This can encourage us to have eyes that see the presence of the creator and the reality of the resurrection in the earth. We see this in the earth we walk on. We can see this in the food we eat. We can see ourselves, as part of the earth, as

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Land: Another Community to Which We Belong

by Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Many of you who read this newsletter are women and men religious whose congregations are well-established in your bioregions. You have been on the same land for more than a hundred years, enjoying its beauty, caring for the native trees and flowers, and delighting in the wildlife with which you share the area. You have developed a **sense of place** – valued in this day and age of mobility and rootlessness. And the land has benefited from your presence! Hopefully you have, in Thomas Berry's words, a "mutually enhancing" human/Earth relationship. And, over these many years, and again hopefully, the members of your communities have developed a passion for Earth described by Jim Profit, S.J. in our lead article.

However, maybe the lovely scenario painted in the above paragraph is *not* true for your community. Maybe the pressures of diminishing numbers, along with the growing numbers of retired members needing care, are causing thoughts of divesting of these sacred places, home to human and the other-than-human. Maybe only some fringe members of your congregations are advocating for Earth in the sense of care of your lands, while the majority remain unconcerned, never having developed the sense that we are intimately part of the Earth we come from. After all, our Holy Rules of the past were more concerned with other issues than care of the land. And the institutional Church has certainly spent its energies elsewhere. Besides, our spirituality was unconnected to Earth, focusing on heaven and the life hereafter. So, why is it a surprise that many of us lack that deep appreciation of the sacredness of all of life, the awareness that *the* sacred community is the whole Universe, not only our congregations and our Church?

Recently my passion for religious lands was re-ignited as I walked down the front drive of the motherhouse of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in south St. Louis along the banks of the Mississippi River. Looking toward the water I saw what I had months ago fought along with many other of my Sisters – Pinnacle's casino in progress of development. It was a horror to my eyes, butted up against our beautiful home. Huge trucks had leveled the ground and removed everything green. The promise of bright lights and endlessly droning motors, not to mention tons of concrete, steel, and waste, as well as addictions to gambling, drinking and smoking loomed large in my mind.

How can we stand by and watch the disappearance of places carefully chosen by our founders for their ability to evoke a contemplative spirit? Often these places were sustainable farms in the beginning, and they still have that capability, even though their soil has been ignored for years. These are the lands that have fed

us physically and spiritually, places that have united us and that we have called home. And today, these are the green spaces and the habitats needed as well by an ailing Earth.

It seems to me that we need to change our perceptions if our actions are going to be effective, our voices heard, and our lands preserved. And we need to do this quickly. What could be a greater legacy than for religious communities of men and women to insure that there will be green space in the future? This is not some luxury to be thought of as outside the purview of gospel poverty. It is an absolute necessity for a viable Earth future. The protection of endangered species, the reality of global warming, the sanity of the human, the nurturance of a contemplative spirit – all need the preservation of our sacred places.

How can we let them be paved over, developed to the gills, and treated as a commodity? Obedience to the call of Earth and obedience to our Creator seem now to be one and the same. Poverty is requiring us to spend our resources giving back to the Earth that gave us life. And celibacy calls us to care for future generations of human and other-than-human life by treasuring the places we have tended for so many years and providing for their continued pristine presence.

My hope is that, as our religious sensibilities are developed to broaden the context of our care to include the other-than-human, even the thought of selling our lands to insensitive developers out to "boost the economy" of our regions will be a horror. Then we will have the voice and resolve to enter into agreements to place our lands in trust and insure their presence for generations to come.



Maxine Pohlman, a School Sister of Notre Dame and Program Assistant at La Vista Ecological Learning Center, nurtures her "at home-ness" with Earth by tending square foot gardens and making a sacred space for prayer in her back yard.



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"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

- Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*, 1949

(If We Have Eyes That See... continued from page 4)

the presence of the Divine. Our seeing gives us hope.

We are also called to humility. Humility is derived from the same Latin root, humus, meaning "earth" and "soil". The humility to which we are called is a felt experience that we are not separate from the earth, nor controllers, nor even stewards of it. Our humility can give us a greater sensitivity to the ecological sin in which we participate, seeking forgiveness, knowing that true forgiveness requires a conversion, a transformation of our behavior.

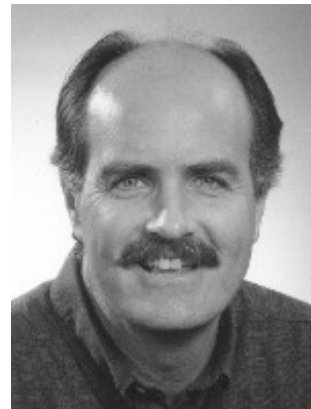
Crossroads...

At this moment, our human community is at a crossroads. We are faced with real choices. We are being called to discover the earth as our home, our place of comfort, peace, nourishment and renewal, our source of truth and wisdom.

We are being called to discover the intimate relationship we have with each other and with the entire universe. To the extent that our relationships are fractured and broken, we are being called to heal these. We are being called to dedicate ourselves as individuals and congregations to protect the earth from further destruction, particularly our specific role in this destruction through our lifestyles. Only by heeding this call and making a choice for the earth can we truly experience the sacred community that we are. ☯

(Reprinted with permission of James Profit)

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James Profit is a Jesuit priest trained in agriculture, rural sociology, and theology. He is the director of the Jesuit Collaborative for Ecology, Agriculture and Forestry (JCEAF), and coordinator of the *Ecology Project*. Jim's love for the outdoors was nurtured by his upbringing in Prince Edward Island, and by living in Jamaica, Manitoulin Island and at the *Ignatius Jesuit Centre of Guelph*, Ontario.

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