



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 • lange@omiusa.org

Autumn 2005
Volume 6, Issue 15

Signs of Our Times

by Maurice Lange, OMI

"What took them so long?" "Why didn't they respond sooner?" "Don't they care?"

In the days following Hurricane Katrina, those were the cries of the poor that were directed at various governmental agencies and certain elected and appointed officials. The mismanagement of the response reveals that Katrina and what resulted was a true disaster: both natural and "man"-made.

"They knew it was coming...they recognized the dangers...they saw the effects..."

Even the Weather Channel had said before the storm made landfall that what endangered New Orleans was the water from Lake Ponchartrain being pushed into the city by the counter-clock-wise winds. One only had to watch any number of news channels at any hour during the first couple of days after landfall to see the already horrendous situation deteriorate ever further. For days upon days the inability to properly mobilize took an unimaginable toll on people, on both those who survived and those who ultimately did not.

The FEMA official was replaced...the Presidential approval rating sank lower...there was disagreement as to who should investigate...

Does it feel like we are shuffling chairs on the *Titantic*? Across the country many are still dumbfounded and outraged at such scandalous inefficiency. How can such a thing happen *here*?! We have responded with both a generous outpouring of aid and much finger pointing.

What good can we make out of this? What happens if we don't?

During my internship at Genesis Farm I learned that it would likely take a *disaster* in order for us to change our outmoded perceptions that lead to the constant unraveling of the ecological web of life. I wonder if Katrina is disaster enough?

For if we were to zoom-out from the current headlines and tune-in to the unimaginable toll on the Earth that our unsustainable technologies and lifestyles are having, we may be just as shocked: only this time, we, ourselves, will also be incriminated.

Is it true that when we point a finger at someone else, there are several other fingers on our hand pointing back at us?

The inefficiency that led to the compounded suffering during the Katrina disaster is born from the identical mindset that leads our society to ecological indifference: thus the planetary crisis worsens before our eyes. Yet we pretend it is not *really* happening.

In 1990, in his world day of peace message, Pope John Paul II said that the *"ecological crisis is a moral issue"*.¹ In 1992 the Union of Concerned Scientists issued a document entitled *"A Warning To Humanity"* attempting to wake us up to the severe consequences for the biosphere due to unsustainable human activity.²

It's not like we haven't been alerted to this.

We now know the signs of these ecological times. Even the government's own most recent studies indicate the reality of climate change and the resulting rise in sea levels.³ This waiting catastrophe is attributed to human causes. What will it take for us to change our consumptive ways?



(continued on pg 6)

Letter from the Director

Autumn has arrived! After a warmer and much drier than typical Summer, we are grateful for the cooler and wetter conditions that Fall has graced us with so far.

With the onset of a new season comes expanded programming here at the **La Vista Ecological Learning Center**. Please see our schedule on page 6 and consider signing up for one of the Autumn retreats.

I would like to introduce Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND. Maxine is a native St. Louisan and a recent graduate of the 12 week Earth Literacy program at Genesis Farm in New Jersey. Maxine joined the Learning Center staff here in Godfrey this summer and has been a very welcome addition. She jumped right in assisting with our Earth Literacy pro-



Fr. Maurice Lange, OMI, standing next to Annie Hoagland and Alley Ringhausen, receives the 'Gladys Levis Allen Conservation Award' for the Oblates in April, 2004.

Autumn, 2005

grams (see her great article on pages 4 & 5) and has helped put together the new Fall schedule. Welcome Maxine!

What inspires so many folks who come here to broaden their vision is the *land itself*: this land here on these bluffs. We as staff work to help evoke a mutually enhancing human/Earth relationship but see *Earth itself* as the primary teacher. Thus we dedicate space in this issue to the second of a two-part series: Alley Ringhausen, from the local organization called the *Great Rivers Land Trust*, describes how, in working with the Oblates, **this land has been preserved in perpetuity**.

The soil of this land, a gift from the glaciers of long-ago ice ages, continues to provide abundant harvests. In November we conclude the third season of the **Community Supported Garden at La Vista**. Our head farmer, Amy Cloud, has been able to make the most out of a very dry year with plenty of vegetables, herbs and flowers for the 140 shareholder families. Amy is nearing the end of a three-year covenant with this project and has decided to pursue her farming goals elsewhere at the end of this season. We wish Amy all the best and thank her dedication in helping to initiate this project! We are currently engaged in a search for a new head farmer. See our website at www.lavistacsa.org

As the seasons turn here at *La Vista*, we thank you, our readers, for your ongoing support! May your work this Autumn be blessed. May you take time to align with this lovely season of letting go. ☯

- Maurice Lange, OMI

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship

To find a Land Trust Organization in your area, visit the **Land Trust Alliance at www.lta.org**.

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.



Our Forest Legacy

by Alley Ringhausen

High on the bluffs over the Mississippi River near Alton, Illinois is 255 acres of land guaranteed to remain forested throughout the ages.

Oblate Woods, owned by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a Catholic religious order, was the first property protected in Illinois under the Forest Legacy Program (FLP), a partnership between the USDA Forest Service and nearly 30 states to identify and help protect environmentally important forests from conversion to nonforest uses.

The Missionary Oblates have protected their property through a series of scenic conservation and timber easements held by the State of Illinois and Great Rivers Land Trust. Great Rivers Land Trust is a local non-profit organization dedicated to preserving open spaces, scenic beauty, critical wildlife habitat, and the unique river landscape that is our special heritage. Great Rivers accomplishes this goal through a variety of conservation techniques including donation and acquisition of key parcels of land.

The Oblate property is central to Great Rivers' *Youngblood Hollow* project. Great Rivers is attempting to protect the remaining forested watershed in *Youngblood Hollow* and the Oblate property is a significant portion of the watershed.

The Oblates and Great Rivers Land Trust worked for many years putting together this package of conservation easements, which resulted in protection of the bluff land. Great Rivers was able to combine easement acquisition money from the State of Illinois Conservation 2000 Program and the Federal Forest Legacy Program to acquire the conservation easements. The Oblate easements were the first time Forest Legacy money had ever been used in Illinois. The Oblates donated a portion of their land as a local match.

In 1820 38 percent or nearly 13.8 million acres of Illinois was forested. While a 1996 satellite imagery study showed 4.9 million forested acres (14 percent), the trend was on the rise, with an estimated 10 percent increase in forest cover between 1962 and 1985.

Responsibility for the majority-nearly 90 percent- of the wooded acres in Illinois lies in the hands of groups like the Missionary Oblates-private landowners. One tool for protecting these important resources is a conservation easement.

The second of a two part series
on the preservation of the Land
known as *La Vista*.

Conservation easements are legal agreements made with property owners to restrict development on their property—a restriction that transfers with sale of the property into the future. The owner retains ownership of the land, but the title for the easement is held by the state. The purpose of the program is not to open the land for public use, but allow landowners to continue recreational and consumptive resource uses and protect the land from development.

Forest lands on the legacy tracts are managed through a Forest Stewardship Plan developed by the landowner and the local IDNR district forester. The motivating factor for most participating landowners is the desire to ensure that these significant remnant forests are not bulldozed and lost forever.

America's great rivers, the *Mississippi*, the *Illinois*, and the *Missouri*, meet in a broad floodplain bounded by majestic bluffs near Alton, Illinois. Visitors to the area are challenged to find a comparison to its beauty. Fortunately Great Rivers Land Trust has had the opportunity to assist the Oblates in assuring that the aesthetics of this confluence region will never change. Although the Oblates will continue to own and use their property as they currently do, the land is protected for future generations. ☺



Margaret Morrissey and Fr. David Kallert, OMI at the dedication of the *Oblate Woods* into the Great Rivers Land Trust in July, 2000.

AN INVITATION FROM THE UNIVERSE

by Maxine Pohlman, SSND

For years I felt like I was walking around with a rock in my shoe. Something was wrong, throwing me off balance, causing me to be uncomfortable in many areas of my life.

My prayer was off base, my teaching lacked integrity, and my friendships were hurting. I felt alienated from my church, my culture, and my profession. I was restless in the extreme.

One day two years ago I felt a tectonic shift inside while I was alone one morning among my outdoor friends - the purple morning glories, the blooming cactus, and the faithful asparagus fern. I felt a surge of hope and a plan of action: ask for a sabbatical and do something to care for Earth. The message encouraged me to change everything – my prayer, my ministry, my housing, my way of being on Earth. And, to the surprise of this slow-to-act human being, I charged forward, taking the first bold steps into a new life which I could not even envision.

I made plans to stop teaching at the end of the school year and to pursue a sabbatical at *Genesis Farm* in Blairstown, New Jersey, becoming a participant in the twelve-week Earth Literacy program. It was during this residency program that I was



Jack Lau, OMI introducing each of the locally grown dishes.



2005 Earth Literacy Participants in the nearby Discovery Garden.

stretched in every conceivable way. I experienced the chaotic work of leaving behind unhealthy concepts and a lifestyle devoid of serious concern for Earth as I was led to explore an emerging alternative worldview. Immersed in the natural world, I was thrilled to discover the rock-in-my-shoe feeling disappear as I developed practical living skills for a more ecological lifestyle. Forging a deeper connection with the land of the Ridge and Valley Region, I grew in my appreciation for its essential significance in providing my food. However, faced with the need to be gainfully employed, and desiring to find work consonant with what I was learning, I wondered where this new life would lead me.

Invitation Deepens

To my great delight, I was led to the *Oblate Ecological Initiative* in Godfrey, Illinois, to become a staff member in the *La Vista Ecological Learning Center* as well as a shareholder in the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista*. One of the first programs I helped to staff was a weeklong version of the Earth Literacy program I had participated in the year before at Genesis Farm. It was masterfully created by Maurice Lange, OMI, director of the Learning Center, along with his Oblate brothers Bob Aaron and Norm Comtois.

Now it was my turn to welcome participants, many of whom felt a similar call to my own two years

earlier. Together we maneuvered through the week, experiencing the internal chaos caused by challenging presentations such as "Universe Story," "Galaxies, Stars, Elements," "Living Earth and the Human Story," "Sacrificial Dimensions of the Universe," and "Bioregionalism." Presenters deftly facilitated insightful comments and deep questions that continually emerged, giving birth to an awakened understanding of what it means to be a human being in an expanding universe.



Dr. Sarah Perkins explains the region to Earth Literacy Participants.

Participants expected to painfully change their eating habits as they experienced a plant-based, regional and seasonal diet. To their surprise they joyfully ate their way through superb vegetarian meals prepared by two amazing Oblate chefs, Jack Lau and Charlie Gilbert. They "oohed" and "aahed" as they were introduced to dishes such as peach soup, edamame and corn stir fry, tomato sorbet, stuffed squash blossoms, and rhubarb upside down cake.

Removed from access to the comforts of technological nests lined with computers, televisions, radios and cars, participants instead reveled in the breathtaking vistas from the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. At night their eyes turned skyward, learning to identify Jupiter and the Summer Triangle. They "got down and got dirty" as they harvested tomatoes and planted lettuce in the organic garden guided by Farmer Amy Cloud. Guided by our chefs, they emerged as outstanding cooks as they prepared a delectable meal from their rich harvest.

By the final day, participants were ready for anything, having become enamored by the possibility of living a life that enhances the whole Earth community, not just the human. They were not disappointed as they traveled in a van for a field trip up the Great River Road back in time with biologist Dr. Sarah Perkins. Steeped in the bioregion, Sarah by example taught them what it means to be a bioregionalist. She described the geologic events that created the bluffs that grew more ancient as we traveled north on the River Road. Introducing us to the *Great Rivers Land Trust*, she explained how she and other private citizens helped found this organization for the purpose of protecting the lands along this extraordinarily beautiful stretch of the Mississippi River. During a stop at Principia College, she taught about the prairie bluffs as well as about a woolly mammoth recently discovered there. The trip ended at the site of an Indian burial mound in Pere Marquette State Park where Sarah invited participants to make an entry in their "Earth Journal" about the story that unfolded for them throughout that day.

My hope for myself, and for all who are trying to deepen their consciousness of Earth, is expressed in two lines from poet Mary Oliver where she says,

*May I be the tiniest nail in the house of the universe,
tiny but useful. May I stay forever in the stream.* ☺

* Oliver, Mary. *Blue Iris: Poems and Essays*. Beacon Press, Boston, MA. 2004.



Maxine Pohlman is a native of St. Louis and a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame. After twenty-six years teaching religious education in grade and high schools in Iowa, Missouri, and Illinois, she is thoroughly enjoying the challenge and delight of teaming with the gracious

Oblates in educating people in the area of ecological awareness and the Sacred Story of the Universe.

Information on *La Vista Ecological Learning Center* and the *Community Supported Garden at La Vista* can be found at www.lavistacsa.org.



“Unless we change the direction in which we are headed, we might
wind up where we are going.”

- Chinese Proverb

(continued from pg 1)

Perhaps there has been recent disaster enough to prompt us to change. Leading thinkers (such as the scientists mentioned above) believe that it will be in these early years of the 21st century that a difference can and must be made.

Otherwise, what will future generations say as they suffer from the severely degraded Earth that they will have inherited? I imagine them also to be shocked and scandalized and ask the same tough questions of **our** generation: “*What took them so long?*” “*They recognized the dangers!*” “*Why didn’t they respond sooner?*”

In memory of all those affected by Katrina and the aftermath, let us wake up with a changed consciousness: living ecologically real, compassionate lives, nurturing a mutually-enhancing human-Earth relationship. ☯

“Choose life so that you and your descendants shall live.”

Footnotes

- 1 - www.jknirp.com/pjpenv.htm
- 2 - www.ucsusa.org
- 3 - www.ems.org/climate/pentagon_climate_change.html

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

OEI Calendar 2005

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 9/15-11/17 Thurs nights | <i>“Choices for Sustainable Living”</i> 9 Week Discussion Course |
| Sept 17 Saturday | <i>Autumn Equinox</i> Celebrate as Fall begins |
| Oct 11,12&14 Weekdays | <i>“Kids Explore God’s Creation”</i> Students immersed in the natural world |
| Nov 5-6 Sat- Sun | <i>Autumn Bluff Retreat</i> Fall Ecospirituality Retreat |
| Nov 13 4:00 pm | <i>Community Supported Garden</i> Harvest Party |
| Dec 10-11 Sat-Sun | <i>December Retreat</i> Advent Ecospirituality Retreat |
| Dec 21 7:00 pm | <i>Winter Solstice</i> Celebrate as Winter begins |

For more information, please call 618-466-5004