



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

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## Sometimes the Hardest Thing to See Is What's in Front of One's Eyes

by Kevin McLaughlin, OMI

I've always liked taking photographs of things. In the not so distant past, these ambitions were limited and didn't extend much beyond holiday and family snapshots. There always seemed to be a disappointingly huge gap between what I was seeing with my eyes and what the camera was capturing on film. The digital revolution changed everything. For a one-off cost, it became possible to snap away to my heart's content, get instantaneous results and not worry about the expense of film and processing. It was a liberation. My camera became a well-used accessory, particularly on travels and hikes. I discovered that the more I shot, the better I got. As my technical abilities gradually improved, I felt more confident in investing in better equipment and bought my first DSLR camera. It is bulky and has buttons whose function I'm still working out, but learning how to use it is part of the pleasure, and the results can be spectacular.

And the gap between what I was seeing and what the camera was capturing began to narrow.

I also began to notice a subtle and growing change in outlook. Instead of just snapping away at anything that looked interesting, I began to slow down and become more discerning, more aware of light and colour, more attentive of detail and movement, more appreciative of beauty and variety in the natural world. Imagining and composing scenes as potential photographs began to suggest a certain way of looking where patterns, textures, framing, lines and contrasts became more important and noticeable. I love the seasonal changes in landscapes, the shifting colours of nature as the year progresses and the way that light varies as the day unfolds. All of these variables began to make the familiar less so and seemed to reveal a hidden richness that a cursory glance or a rush to photograph could never see. It's like the difference between hearing and listening. Taking photographs has helped me to better see

what is there and has given me many moments of delight when the camera has captured and preserved even more of what I thought I was seeing. It's as good as writing for every photo tells a story.

La Vista was a gift to my eyes and the camera. Coming from Ireland, the change in overall environment was immediately apparent and I took great pleasure in noticing those differences as I set about trying to get a sense of this wonderful place. So much to see that

was beautiful and new to me! The camera was a valuable aid in this. At the most basic level, taking photographs of butterflies, birds, insects and plants helped me to identify and differentiate them, to give them a name and thus learn more about them – habitats, life cycles, relationships, their place in the overall ecosystem and so



on. Everything from snakes to deer has a part to play and everything is interconnected. It is a delight to notice, to see, to name and to recognise the animal and plant life all around going about their daily business for this helps develop a sense of place. And having such a sense inevitably leads to love.

The woodlands, pastures and the Mississippi river at La Vista became a visual playground for me. So much drew my attention. I loved the variety and beauty of the butterflies. Swallowtails, skippers, monarchs and buckeyes were species all new to me and, as photos began to reveal them in all their multi-coloured splendour, delicacy and detail, my appreciation and delight in them grew. Sitting among the milkweed in the pastures as the swallowtails and monarchs flitted from plant to plant gave me some beautiful moments. I loved the interplay between the sunlight and the trees of the woodland, the way it varied between morning

*(continued on page 6)*

## Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends of La Vista,

A couple of years ago one special Oblate novice made a deep impression on the staff of the Learning Center and the Garden. Jason Rossignol, OMI, truly made La Vista his home during his novitiate year. He gathered a five gallon bucket of chanterelle mushrooms in the woods and cooked them, made beautiful cedar boxes from downed trees, lent a helpful hand in the Garden, and sped around the grounds on a tractor like a house afire with the other novices hanging on for dear life, enjoying the ride!

In my thinking, he had a “sense of place” that embodies what we hope for at the Learning Center; people who are immersed in their bioregion, creating a relationship that enhances both people and the planet. It is a privilege to welcome Jason back to La Vista as an intern this summer. He has created some interesting and creative workshops and celebrations, and I hope you can join us to share his enthusiasm and expertise.

It’s been a year since another Oblate, Kevin McLaughlin, visited La Vista. In four months time he impressed us as he came to know as much about this region as many who have spent a lifetime here. Riding his bike, camera around his neck,

he traveled the roads learning the names of every butterfly and bird he encountered. He also astutely discovered the ecological problems of our area. Kevin exemplified what it means to be a “placed” person, loving and caring about the whole Earth community.

You can share his “vision” through the many pictures he took that were made into a beautiful photo-reflection book. (See the article on the bottom of page 2 of this newsletter to find out how you can get one.) Thank you for supporting our work through your donation.

“You can’t know who you are until you know where you are.” This admonition from Wendell Berry assures me that Jason, Kevin, and all of us who know and love our region of life have the deepened sense of self that comes with being a rooted human being. This sense of self is good for us and for our rare and precious planet! ☺

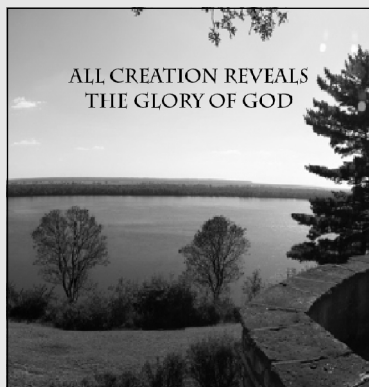
For *La Vista*,  
Maxine Pohlman, SSND



Jason Rossignol, OMI

## *Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Earth Relationship: A Book Recommendation*

***“Creation is not simply material, profane, and therefore of no interest to God.  
On the contrary,  
creation is holy; it is the first manifestation of God’s mystery, it is God’s first word.”***  
(Vade Mecum on OMI JPIC, 1997)



The above quotation is taken from **All Creation Reveals the Glory Of God**, a new photo-reflection book offered as a prayer, meditation and contemplation resource. Our hope is that it may inspire pilgrims on planet Earth who are seeking to deepen their relationship with the God who stands beneath all that lives, moves, and is our destiny.

Most of the photos were taken by the author of the article on page one of this issue, Kevin McLaughlin, OMI, during his visit to La Vista in Godfrey. His stunning photos of reveal the beauty of God’s creation resplendent throughout the year in vistas both small and great. Jim Brobst, OMI, and Rusty Gardiner, OMI also contributed wonderful photos.

The pictures are accompanied by carefully chosen quotes from a variety of sources including Catholic teaching, well-known ecologists, Oblate sources, and Scripture.

To order a book for yourself or as a gift,  
please send a check for \$12 (includes \$2 shipping fee)  
to La Vista Ecological Learning Center, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035.  
If you live nearby, you can purchase one in our office for \$10.



# Grown from the Earth

by Chloe Huelsmann

Swiss chard, kale, tomatoes, carrots, and beet stems simmer together in a skillet on my kitchen stovetop. The rich aroma drifts into the living room. My mom calls us all to the table where we enjoy yet another stir-fry dinner consisting of fresh produce grown at the Community Supported Garden to which we have belonged for ten years.

In 2002, my father helped to create the Community Supported Garden, also known as CSA, at La Vista in Godfrey, Illinois. My father not only had our nutritional health in mind, he also hoped my twin sister and I would feel a connection to the earth, similar to his own experiences milking cows and working on his relatives' farms growing up. The garden is located on a parcel of land owned by the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. It sits on top of the bluffs overlooking the mighty Mississippi River and began as part of the Oblate Ecological Initiative which strives to "enhance the priority of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation." A co-op of shareholders pay the farmer who cares for the land and provides us with an abundance of organic produce from May until mid November.

Along with the produce already weighed and divided, shareholders are also invited to pick their own herbs, flowers, and some vegetables in the fields. During the course of the summer, we pick items such as strawberries, cherry tomatoes, and green beans. This system saves the farmer time, but it is also one of my favorite aspects of the garden. I love picking in the fields, especially the cherry tomatoes. It is a thrill to find the bright, ripe tomatoes among the vines and to enjoy the burst of flavor as I pop one into my mouth. There are other opportunities to work in the fields too. It is recommended that everyone volunteer some of their time each month to help out at the garden. Whether it is being a greeter on pick-up days or taking time to water and pull weeds, every little bit helps. Over the years I have helped build fences, planted and harvested potatoes, and volunteered at the annual garage sale.

Not only has my family enjoyed fresh, locally grown vegetables, but we have also made many new friends. In a day and age when electronics and technology are slowly taking over the way people communicate it is refreshing to meet someone face to face, someone who believes in environmental sustainability as I do. By celebrating the spring and autumn equinox as well as the summer and winter solstice at the Ecological Learning Center, savoring potluck dinners, and participating in the tomato festival at the Garden, my family has had the unique opportunity to connect with nature and our community.

In addition to the Community Supported Garden, I have also relished many vegetables grown on my grandparents' farm

over the years. Unlike many children, I was never given the chance to be a picky eater. The variety of foods presented on my table taught me to appreciate the numerous textures and tastes of the produce that our wonderful Earth creates.

As a result of my exposure to fresh, healthy food and clean water, I have found a possible career path. I want to pursue a career in engineering with the long-term goal of improving or regulating the use of water in the world. Basically, I want to do something that will help improve our environment and conserve the natural resources of our world.

Even though there are a few tastes I dislike, I learned a mantra from my grandfather: "you do not hate something; you are learning to like it." I have found this mantra fits the rest of my life as well. Whether it is a required book I am trying to finish or new subject matter I have not fully comprehended yet, by pushing myself to try my best and never giving up, I have learned that I appreciate my accomplishments more.

Though it may be easier for a consumer to pop a frozen dinner in the microwave, I am grateful that I can enjoy so many fresh vegetables. I know exactly where my food comes from and have even watched it grow.

So please pass the cabbage. ☺

*Chloe Huelsmann, a recent graduate from Alton High School, wrote this essay for the Meridian Chancellor's scholarship which she was awarded! This fall she will be a freshman at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, studying civil engineering. Chloe has been a faithful and a delightful participant in many programs at La Vista since she was a small child. We wish her all the best as she begins her college career, and we thank her for this lovely reflection.*



## NEW PROGRAMS JUNE – DECEMBER

Please register by calling 618-466-5004.

### Air-Conditioner Garden: Creative Water Recycling Saturday, June 15 1:00 - 4:00 pm

Don't let your air-conditioner's precious water go to waste during the hot summer months; instead, channel it into a beautiful garden. You'll also learn about other water recycling possibilities from Jason Rossignol, OMI. Free will donation appreciated.



### Square Foot Vegetable and Herb Gardening: a Hands-On Workshop Wednesday, June 19 5:00 - 8:00 pm

Join us this summer for this ongoing seminar. Learn how to build and maintain your very own

square foot garden using found materials. Led by Eric Stevens and Jason Rossignol, OMI. Crystal Moore-Stevens, our resident herbalist, will then teach you how to cultivate an herb garden using the square foot gardening technique, as well as how to use these herbs. Cost: \$25.00 Future dates will be determined at the session.

### Mushroom Walk

Saturday, August 3 1:00 - 4:00 pm

Join us for a leisurely hike in the Oblate Forest in search of scrumptious golden chanterelles. Jason Rossignol and Eric Stevens will be our guides. Free will donation appreciated.



### Celebrate INTERdependence Day: Cooking NaturallyOutdoors Sunday, June 30 1:00 - 5:00 pm

Come celebrate a day of inter-dependence with an outdoor cooking workshop using our own cob ovens and delicious produce. Later enjoy a charming meal with rich conversation. Cost: \$25.00

### Monthly Saturday Morning Centering Prayer in the Lodge 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday from 7:30 – 8:30 am beginning September 28<sup>th</sup>

Align yourself with the generosity of the early morning sun! Take a peaceful drive to La Vista, quietly meander down the road to the lodge through the woods, and give yourself over to a time of centering prayer. Each session will include a time of gentle movement to align energies of mind, body, spirit; a brief reflective reading for nourishment; and twenty minutes of centering prayer. Free will donation appreciated.



## TEILHARD DE CHARDIN, PILGRIM OF THE FUTURE: A Three-Session Series

Saturdays: December 14, January 25, February 22 1:30 – 3:30 pm



Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) was a scientist by profession but also a mystic with a cosmic vision. He contributed to the dialogue between science and religion while at the same time unfolding a world-affirming, hope-filled, Catholic spirituality. While formulating his vision prior to the Second Vatican Council, he is now recognized as a visionary whose insights and spirituality respond to some of the deepest needs and hungers of our own time. Teilhard saw himself as a pilgrim of the future whose journey was made entirely in the past. He models the wise scribe who goes into the storehouse and finds something old and something new (Mt 13:52).

**Dec. 14 *Teilhard's Vision of Hope: Advent and the Divine Milieu***

**Jan. 25 *Who Do We Say That We Are? Teilhard's Appreciation of the Human Person***

**Feb. 22 *Celebrating Life and the Constructive Value of Suffering***

Each session includes input, reflection time, table discussion and Q/A period.

**Don Goergen, O.P.**, our presenter, is a Dominican friar, preacher, lecturer, teacher and author. He currently teaches at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis, MO, where he is also prior of the formation community. His doctorate is in systematic theology, and his dissertation is on Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Cost: \$15 per session and \$40 if you register for all three.

Held at Loretto Center, 590 E. Lockwood Ave. Webster Groves, MO 63119

Register by sending your payment to La Vista, 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035 by December 9.



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- **SPREAD THE WORD:** Tell others about us by sharing this newsletter.
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- **VOLUNTEER:** Help at the Learning Center . Call 618-466-5004.
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**THANK YOU** for your participation. We delight in working with you for the healing of our planet and ourselves!

***Join us for a truly transformative learning experience!***



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

(continued from page 1)

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and evening, the way the light illuminated, highlighted colours and cast shadows. I loved the sense of fecundity, growth and change that came with regular walks into the heart of the woods. The river was an endless source of beauty. Sunsets from the Crow's Nest were spectacular, a remarkable daily technicolor display that never seemed to repeat itself. As I took more and more shots, I began to see how the differences in cloud cover affected the reflecting light, how the river currents subtly changed and how the colours varied and altered according to the passage of the sun.

Photography helped to draw forth all this beauty for me and to reveal more of the ever-changing rhythms of a place that otherwise might not have had the same resonance. Now that I'm back in Ireland, I look back on those photos with affection and love. Each photo brings me back to a moment as I remember what I was trying to capture, what caught my eye, how I felt at the time and the joy of seeing something beautiful or new. For every photo kept, there are a hundred discarded. But it's really not about technical excel-

lence or trying to capture everything. There is a mystery and wonder at the heart of creation that can only be respected, received with gratitude and contemplated. It's the process of photography – the seeing, noticing and appreciating – that brings its own rewards and has become, for me, a way of entering into that sacred space. ☺

**Kevin McLaughlin, OMI**, from the Anglo-Irish Province, has worked mainly in parish ministry in England and Ireland. On completing a Masters in Ecology and Religion last year, he spent some months in the States visiting with Oblates engaged in Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation ministry, including 3 months at La Vista. He is currently in Dublin planning for his next mission, a collaborative ecological project involving religious and lay people to be based in a Spiritan retreat centre in the Irish countryside.



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