



La Vista Ecological Learning Center

A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

June, 2020

E-News and Eco-spirituality Calendar

Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Email: info@lavistaelc.org

Website: lavistaelc.org

(Our monthly reflections are archived in the Blog on our web site.)

June and Ecological Hope

June marks the beginning of the summer season which is good news; the bad news is that it is also the start of mowing season. As I look out the front window I see three lawns mowed to "perfection". Not a blade of grass out of place. No leaf litter, no native plants, no messy trees. No robins grubbing for worms in the grass, no squirrels hunting for nuts; really, no life other than a grass monoculture. These are large yards requiring riding lawnmowers, chemicals, fertilizers and watering. I can imagine that the owners are proud of them. They care that their lawns are deemed "beautiful" in this neighborhood, and they are spending money doing what they believe to be a good thing; however, these lawns don't give me hope!

Looking out my back window I see the opposite. There are weeds, lots of leaf litter, huge red oaks and pine trees continually dropping branches and needles, and a yard full of life. Since October I have counted over thirty bird species visiting the feeder, the trees, the ground and bird houses. Six rose-breasted grosbeaks descended on the feeder at one time. Four native bee nesting boxes are completely occupied. Squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, groundhogs and possums are frequent visitors.



Rose-breasted grosbeaks at backyard feeder

Meanwhile I am reading Doug Tallamy's latest book *Nature's Best Hope* in which he shares this important statistic: more than 83% of

land in our country is privately owned. This fact leads him to conclude that conservation needs to happen on private lands of all kinds; in back yards, small cities and villages and in large corporate landscapes. He tells us, "Conservation is everyone's responsibility." The title *Nature's Best Hope* refers to your and my back yards and to all privately owned land.

Tallamy notes that we can't rely on National Parks alone to do the work of protecting biodiversity. This approach to conservation is obviously not working, is not enough to save many of our plants and animals from extinction. We need something more. He recommends that, in addition to National Parks, we create a *Homegrown National Park* that is made up of lands where we live and work. That's why you and I and any lands we can influence are nature's best hope.

We nurture the virtue of ecological hope whenever we plant native flowers, trees, and shrubs; when we provide habitat for butterflies, bees, frogs, birds, squirrels and bats. We nurture it when we refuse to buy into our cultural obsession with monoculture lawns and when we change what we consider to be beautiful. We nurture it when we celebrate by enjoying the rich life in which we are embedded.

Observing my neighbors' lawns evokes the opposite of celebration. Current statistics tell us we have planted over 40 million acres in lawn, and each weekend we mow an area 8 times the size of New Jersey. This is not sustainable, and *hopefully* someday soon it will no longer be considered the norm for beauty.

Concluding thoughts from the encyclical *Laudato Si'*:
Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems. And one more: All it takes is one good person to restore hope!

World Environment Day Theme: Biodiversity and Coronavirus Friday, June 5



Pollinator Garden at La Vista

Why focus on biodiversity?
What is the connection with coronavirus? The more biodiverse an ecosystem is, the more difficult for one pathogen to spread

rapidly or dominate. Conversely, biodiversity loss sets the stage for pathogens to pass between animals and people.

Deforestation, loss of wildlife habitats, intensified agriculture, and increasing climate change have seriously upset the balance of nature, creating conditions that allow pathogens to spread. This pandemic offers us the chance to revisit our relationship with nature and contribute to a more environmentally responsible world. It is a MUST. Make your backyard an example of biodiversity!

**Tuesday, June 9: Work Day in the Oblates Nature Preserve
9:00 am - Noon**

Do you have cabin fever? Last month a few of us spent a lovely morning on top of the bluff, 6 feet apart, pulling honeysuckle. In an area where we've worked for years we discovered oak seedlings! What a thrill. Please join us and bring your own water and snacks. If you plan on coming please let me know: 618-466-5004.

**Summer Solstice Celebration:
Hear the Sun Singing and Talking!
Saturday, June 20, 2:00 - 4:00 pm**

We have gathered on the bluffs at La Vista for many years to celebrate the beginning of summer and give thanks for that delightful gift. Join us

as we continue this tradition while practicing social distancing. Please bring a lawn chair which you can place where you feel comfortable. We'll have some fun listening to the sun singing and talking and we'll continue our sun staff ritual. Feel free to bring your own refreshments as we will forego communal snacks. Please park near the white barn pictured above.

Let us know if you plan to participate! 618-466-5004 or info@lavistaelc.org.



Sunrise over La Vista Learning Garden

