



# La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

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## A Tornado Delivers a Message

by Debbie Newman

On February 28, 2017, a monster paid me a visit. This monster wasn't slimy, dripping blood, or a demon in my dreams. It arrived larger-than-life, as a twisting, grinding, blowing force bringing much death and destruction. This tornado brought me to my knees.

I have two homes where I live; my physical frame house where I eat, sleep, work, play, live part of my life. My other home is the adjacent woods. I spend plenty of time here, too. This is my spiritual home, my place of true connection to that which is greater than I am, but that of which I am a part. A place of towering trees and splendid forest floor flowers. Both homes were damaged in the tornado. The forest home, however, suffered far greater damage than the frame home.

This monster was, well, a monster! At more than a half mile wide, this EF-4 stayed on the ground for one hour and two minutes. It crossed my property, including about sixty five acres of my woods, just skipping past my house, in approximately four minutes. In a blink of an eye, this "wind" mangled, toppled and snapped thousands of trees. It's hard to comprehend a force that can do such damage until you actually live through it or see it.

In the weeks after the tornado, I often heard the comment, "At least you didn't lose your home and *you* are okay". But in fact, I was not okay. I was *deeply* wounded. True, my physical body, my external self was unharmed and this was a huge blessing; but my heart was suffering immensely from the loss in my beautiful forest. No words could describe it and many could not fully understand it-- though several did. I found I was not the only one crying in the woods, as I watched some friends completely overcome with emotion when they saw the damage.

And at some point during those weeks of deep

despair, it hit me. "It is *not* hard to comprehend a force that could do such damage. We, the human force, are doing damage like this to forests all over the world, every day!" I wanted to shout from every rooftop "Why!?" Why would anyone intentionally choose to wreak havoc on a forest like mine just endured?

I have worked for 30+ years as an ecologist and healthy lands practitioner, and thus I've always had a professional relationship with forests. I have always loved forests, but not the way I do today. My perspective has evolved, especially after 20 years of owning my own woodlands. In recent years I've contemplated the trees as much more than just habitat for wildlife, or shade for our yards, or timber to build our houses. I still understand the utilitarian value of our forests, but I have come to deeply appreciate the mastery behind the Creation of these organisms we call 'trees'.

In order to be a good land manager you must learn about the individual species - what they need to be healthy, how and where they like to grow, their relationship to other organisms. Trees' lives are every bit as complicated, difficult, and fascinating as

ours...and they manage something we have yet to master...they can live for hundreds of years! It is hard to ignore the attributes of trees if you just sit with them for even a little while.

My first walk in my woods after the monster tore through will certainly go down as one of the most gut-wrenching experiences of my life. Far more than that of a professional ecologist viewing a massive restoration challenge. These trees, many which I knew personally, many of which I sat under, hugged, admired, and had valiantly struggled. I lost trees that had sprouted 140 years ago! The oaks especially did not give up easily. As the months progressed the will to live was shockingly apparent. Trees snapped off 20' up had sprouted leaves, while whole canopies of toppled trees still partially rooted,



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**Letter from the Editor**

Dear Friends of La Vista,

Greetings from peaceful La Vista on a cold and quiet winter day! Visitors often say peace is what they feel as soon as they enter this sacred land. However, right now I am more able to identify with the image in the page one article—a tornado. Life seems out of control on our planet and in our country. Sometimes all I want to do is hunker down and hang on until times change.

In her article *A Tornado Delivers a Message*, Debbie Newman offers us much to think about as well as suggestions for doing more than hiding in a basement until danger passes. Debbie has overseen stewardship and protection of the Oblates Nature Preserve for many years, and we enjoy partnering with her.

If you are interested in more ways to be proactive during our uncertain times, please join us at the Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in April when Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker will give the keynote address at the conference

*Sacred Earth, Our Common Home*. Mary Evelyn has spoken and written extensively on *Laudato Si'*, and she will share her wisdom and suggestions with us. See page 5 for details.

Finally, there are many more programs in our calendar of events which provide opportunities for joining with others who also want to engage in meaningful conversations and spiritual practices that nurture love of Creation. Please join us for one or more of them.

As always thank you for bringing peace and activism to our rare and precious planet.

For La Vista,

Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Angie Jungbluth and Sister Maxine  
(Angie will teach *Nature Journaling through the Seasons*.  
See page 4. for information.)



## Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human/Insect Earth Relationship

### Resources for You

#### The Center for Spirituality in Nature

[www.centerforspirituality.org](http://www.centerforspirituality.org)

This web site suggests excellent spiritual practices designed to draw people back to their center and to a closer relationship with God, while opening them to a loving connection with the natural world. From the web site: “Mindful practice in, around, and through the natural world can offer a rich experience of Spirit and cultivate a deeper connection with the earth.”

You will also find other resources such as suggested readings, helpful hints, film and video, organizations and additional web sites for nurturing spiritual practice. This web site is truly a rich gift.

#### Healing Earth

<https://healingearth.ijep.net/>

This free, online environmental science textbook aims to help students and other readers grow into integral ecologists who dare to imagine a healed Earth. As a textbook, it is full of scientific fact and information; unlike normal textbooks, it includes *ethical analysis, spiritual reflections and a call to action*.

As a part of the International Jesuit Ecology Project it is a global effort raising questions beyond the scientific realm, inviting readers to go deeply into their own hearts to determine what needs to be transformed, both within us and in the world. A very fine resource!

### Volunteer Opportunities at La Vista

If you are interested in enhancing your relationship with Earth through volunteer work on the land, call 618-466-5004 and indicate your interest in either the pollinator garden or the nature preserve. We'd love to have you join our established groups.

## Daring to Dream of the Roles of Religion and Planetary Civilization

by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim

Excerpts are taken with permission from the Fall/Winter 2017 issue of the *Teilhard Perspective* published by the American Teilhard Association

For decades, environmental issues were considered the concern only of scientists, lawyers, and policy makers. Now the ethical dimensions of the environmental crisis are becoming more obvious. ***What is our moral responsibility toward future generations? How can we ensure equitable development that does not destroy the environment? Can religious and cultural perspectives help solve environmental challenges?***

Among environmentalists, a conviction deepens: though science and policy approaches are clearly necessary, they are not sufficient to do the job of transforming human consciousness and behavior for a sustainable future.

***Values and ethics, religion and spirituality are important factors in this transformation.***

We might expand these statements to declare that the twenty-first century will be remembered by this extension of our moral concerns not only to humans, but to other species and eco-systems as well — the Earth community as a whole. From social justice to ecojustice, the movement of human care pushes out in ever widening concentric circles. ***The future of our withering planet, a commitment to its protection and restoration, may depend on the largeness of our embrace.***

Our challenge now is to identify the vision and values that will spark a transformation toward creating such a planetary civilization. A sustainable future requires not just managerial or legislative approaches — the saving of forests or fisheries — ***but a vision of that future, evoking depths of empathy, compassion, and sacrifice for the welfare of future generations. We are called to a new intergenerational consciousness and conscience.***

***The future of our withering planet, a commitment to its protection and restoration, may depend on the largeness of our embrace.***

But solutions must inspire participation and action rather than frighten or disempower people. The next generation is searching for ways to contribute to a positive future. Life in all its variety and beauty calls to us for a response — a new integrated understanding of who we are as humans. This is not only about stewardship of the Earth, but about embracing our embeddedness in nature in radical, fresh, and enlivening ways. Humans, Earth and the rest of life are bound in a single story and destiny. It is no longer a question of “saving the environment” as if it was something out there apart from us.

***We humans are the environment, and it is us — shaping our minds, nourishing our bodies, refreshing our spirit.***

The task of articulating an integrated vision and identifying effective values requires new language, broader framing, inspiring images, captivating metaphors, and, most of all, new stories and dreams. As cultural historian Thomas Berry says: ***“If a society’s cultural world — the dreams that have***

***guided it to a certain point — become dysfunctional, the society must go back and dream again.”***

Currently the dreaming meets an impasse. There’s a puzzling disconnection between our growing awareness of environmental problems and our ability to change our present direction. We have failed to translate facts about the environmental crisis into effective action in the United States. We are discovering that the human heart is not changed by facts alone but by engaging visions and empowering values. ***Humans need to see the large picture and feel they can act to make a difference.***



## Program Calendar January—May, 2018

### Winterfires Coffeehouse

**Saturday, January 20, 7:00 – 9:00 pm**

It's that time of year when gathering around a hearth sounds like a great idea, and doing that at lovely La Vista with congenial friends makes it even better. Please join us and bring an original or found poem, a story, a joke (Someone will have to take Fr. Rudy's place!!) and/or your musical instrument. You will find an appreciative audience, inspiration, delicious refreshments, coffee, and Mexican hot chocolate. We'll gather in the Oblates' home.

**Cost:** Donations to support our programming are always welcome.

**Registration:** Please call 618-466-5004 or e-mail us at [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org) and let us know how many are coming. Please bring a snack along with your verbal or musical contribution.

### Conversations on Dying and Death

**Saturday, January 27 10:00 - 11:30 am**

If you find yourself tongue-tied about the end of physical life and want to be free and comfortable to discuss and actively participate in this sacred moment, please join in these conversations. *Beginning conversation:* exploring your own desires and choices, how to approach end-of-life issues with sensitivity; comforting ways to remove fear of death. *Continuing the conversation:* palliative and hospice care, and how to include family members in your sacred journey. Throughout the presentation there will be opportunities for sharing wisdom and getting answers.

**Madeleine Lane, SSND, MA, L.M.F.T.**, is a clinical member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy, practicing as a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist. She is the Founder of The Family Center with over thirty years of educational, pastoral and counseling experience, including spiritual direction. Madeleine's area of expertise is grief counseling.

**Cost: \$15**

**Registration:** Use the form on page 5.

### Lenten Reflection and Prayer Hour

**On Care for Our Common Home:**

**Pope Francis's Call to Conversion**

**Wednesdays, 2/21, 2/28, 3/7, 3/14, 3/21, 3/28**

**7:15 – 8:15 PM** Held in the Oblates' Chapel at La Vista Pope Francis' latest encyclical, *Laudato Si*, invites us into prayer and conversion, two hallmarks of the Lenten season. These sessions are not study sessions as we have done in the past. Listening prayerfully to Francis's alluring words is another way to enter the spirit of this compelling encyclical. A short introductory reflection will be followed by a prayerful reading of a passage from the encyclical, silence to ponder the words, time for sharing insights, and concluding prayer. It is not necessary to have a copy of the encyclical, but it is available online: <https://laudatosi.com/watch>

**Cost:** None, but optional donations to support our programming are welcome and helpful.

**Registration:** Please call 618-466-5004 or e-mail [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org) and let us know how many are coming.

### Fasting from Plastic for Lent

**Film and Discussion: *Plastic Paradise***

**Monday, February 12 7:00 – 8:30 pm**

The movie *Plastic Paradise* tells us that every single piece of plastic that has ever been produced since the 19<sup>th</sup> century is still *somewhere* on our planet. If it never goes away, where does it go, and what can we do about it? Lent is the perfect time to commit to the discipline of fasting from plastic. Pope Francis says, "There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, **such as avoiding the use of plastic.** . . ." (# 211, *Laudato Si'*) Join us and be motivated to join the movement to rid our world of plastic.

**Cost:** Suggested donation: \$5

**Registration:** Please call 618-466-5004 or e-mail [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org).

### Nature Journaling through the Seasons

**Saturdays, March 31, 1:00 – 3:00 pm; June 9,**

**9:00 – 11:00 am; Sept. 15, 9:00 – 11:00 am;**

**January 12, 2019, 1:00 – 3:00 pm**

Enjoy exploring nature? How would you like to experience your outdoor time at a deeper and richer level? If this piques your interest, then join us once each season as we learn how to record our outdoor discoveries through Nature Journaling. We will start inside to get acquainted with techniques and strategies and then move outside to journal. Nature Journaling is an excellent way to document your discoveries, thoughts, questions, and more as you explore the great outdoors! All skill levels are welcome – although artistic talent is not required.

**Angie Jungbluth** is a veteran science teacher, has done programs for the Missouri Department of Conservation for many years, is a Volunteer Master Naturalist, and signature member of the St. Louis Watercolor Society. She is an experienced nature journaling teacher and considers it a favorite pastime.

**Cost:** \$15 per session, or \$60 for all four.

**Registration:** Use the form on page five. Please indicate which sessions you will be attending.

**Materials:** Upon registration, you will receive a materials list.



## Registration Form/Donation Form

Name of Program \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Street

City

State

Zip Code

Amount Enclosed: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

*Registration confirmation will be sent via e-mail.*

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



### Spring Equinox Celebration and Presentation on Bees Saturday, March 24, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Celebrate the beginning of spring and enjoy Pat and Jerry Veicht's passion for bees and honey. They started one apiary with 2 hives in 2012 and now have multiple hives in nine apiaries, including La Vista where they have 36 hives! Aware of the crisis among bee colonies, Pat and Jerry appreciate any opportunity to teach how we can aid all species of bees.

**Cost:** Donations to support our programming are always welcome.

**Registration:** Please call 618-466-5004 or e-mail [info@lavistaec.org](mailto:info@lavistaec.org) and let us know how many are coming. Please bring a snack to share.

### Summer Solstice and Celebration of National Pollinator Week Saturday, June 23, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Our wonderful seasons are marked by the work of pollinators: the bloom of spring wildflowers, summer berry picking, pumpkin harvesting in the fall. Our lives are blessed by many pollinators, but bees are the most important pollinator and are seriously affected by the loss of nesting sites. You can make a difference to bees! Vernon DePauw will lead us in making bee nesting structures to take home and install in our yards and in the Pollinator Garden at La Vista. There will also be bee nests for sale.

**Cost:** Donations to support our programming are always welcome.

**Registration:** Please call 618-466-5004 or e-mail us at [info@lavistaec.org](mailto:info@lavistaec.org) and let us know how many are coming. Please bring a snack to share.

### Our Sacred Earth, Our Common Home: Reflection & Action on Laudato Si'

Saturday, April 21, 9:00 am – 12:30 pm

Held at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows, Belleville, Illinois

Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, who collaborated for many years with cultural historian and Earth scholar Fr. Thomas Berry, will deliver the keynote address at this event devoted to the study and implementation of Pope Francis' landmark encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si'*. Participants will then take part in a series of "hands-on" break-out sessions. The morning will conclude with a feedback and takeaway session. This event is intended for individuals and parish groups looking for inspiration as well as practical ways to care for our common home, our sacred Earth.



**Mary Evelyn Tucker, Ph.D.** is a Senior Lecturer and Research Scholar at the School of Forestry and Environmental Studies at Yale Divinity School. Working with Brian Swimme, they created a multi-media project called *Journey of the Universe*.

**Cost:** \$25 adults, \$15 for students (For those who are able, we suggest a payment of \$40 to cover yourself and the fee of a student who cannot afford to pay.)

**Registration:** Call the Shrine at 618-394-6270 or register through the Shrine online at <https://snows.org/events-2/our-sacred-earth-our-common-home/>



La Vista Ecological Learning Center  
4300 Levis Lane  
Godfrey, Illinois 62035

***We are called to  
a new  
intergenerational  
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and conscience.***

**- Mary Evelyn Tucker  
and John Grim**

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(Continued from page 1)

leafed out. I suffered with the trees at the initial destruction and I soared with them when they tried to recover, albeit in vain. Really, it felt like what happened to these trees, happened to me. It was hard to separate their distress from my own.

In the superb book "*The Hidden Life of Trees*", the author focuses much attention on the connectedness of everything in the forest. Animals eat parts of trees, live in trees, and the trees in turn, take from us as well. Nutrients returned to the soil from dead animals feed trees. And how connected are we, really, to trees? Well, don't forget that any given day the oxygen molecules released by your nearby tree might end up in your lungs!

But our collective human view of nature, of trees remains mostly utilitarian in an impersonal sense and thus we plunder, we cut and bulldoze without regard to how, when, where we do it. It gnawed away at me that I had no choice about the fate of my forest, Mother Nature was in charge; yet there are people, companies, governments making choices every day to unleash tornadic fury on our forests, without a flinch. No distress on their part.

Can we find a way to change our perspectives and attitudes towards trees, forests? Can we go beyond think-

ing they are just objects here to serve us? Can we volunteer a couple days a year at a forest (At La Vista!) to pull out invasive plants; or commit to always buy recycled paper products? Or buy wood sustainably grown? But even more important, can all humans take one day of life to sit under a tree and really meditate on these splendid beauties? Moving closer to the trees makes it impossible to willfully abuse them. What happens to them, happens to us.

**Debbie Scott Newman** is the primary author of *Creating Habitats and Homes for Illinois Wildlife* and has been a natural areas preservation specialist for the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission for over twenty years.



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