



## La Vista Ecological Learning Center

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A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

## E News and Ecospirituality Calendar

April, 2024

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Reflections are archived in the [blog](#) on our web site [lavistaelc.org](http://lavistaelc.org)

### Nature's Soul



A few weeks ago, OMI Novices and I took a field trip to [Treehouse Wildlife Center](#) where the "intrinsic value" of creatures is honored, "independent of their usefulness" as Laudato Si' states in paragraph 140. One of the permanent residents is a turkey vulture named Einstein, later discovered to be female. She was found as a chick and raised by a family. Since Einstein was human imprinted, she could not be released back into

the wild because, seeing herself more human than vulture, she would have trouble surviving. She is a resident for life, living in a glass enclosure inside the TreeHouse Center.

This is a photo of a painting which hangs near her enclosure. It shows Einstein looking in a mirror and seeing herself human-like. The artist poignantly captured Einstein's perspective, and the human face is haunting, so much so that I was disturbed by the image.

Upon reflection, I find the painting holds implications for us humans who also seem to have an issue with self-identity. We, too, often live in a self-constructed world and fail to see reality, having been disconnected from the natural world for so long. We feel fundamentally unrelated to sun and moon, wind, rain, birds and all the many living beings we often don't even notice as we live our daily lives.

Richard Rohr describes our situation as having "lost our souls", and so we cannot see soul anywhere else. He writes,

“Without a visceral connection to the soul of nature, we will not know how to love or respect our own soul...While everything has a soul, in many people it seems to be dormant, disconnected, and ungrounded. They are not aware of the inherent truth, goodness, and beauty shining through everything.” Rohr believes “...we can’t access our full intelligence and wisdom without some real connection to nature.”

Maybe that is one reason our wonderful world is suffering so much at our hands and why we are suffering too. We are like the vulture whose life is limited, enclosed, and out-of-touch with the magnificence of the natural world that is now beyond her reach; however, we have a choice! We can reclaim our soul within the Great Soul that is the Mystical Body holding all.

It seems that fitting conclusion to this reflection would be to listen to Heather Houston's ["Re-Wild My Soul"](#).



### Reflection on Novices' March Field Trip

Wanting to explore sustainability and ecological education, topics covered in the encyclical *Laudato Si*, we visited the [National Great Rivers Research and Education Center](#) in West Alton, Illinois. In paragraph 215 of the encyclical we read, “If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize

that certain mindsets really do influence our behavior. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society, and our relationship with nature”.

We surely found our mindsets challenged as we experienced many sustainable elements of the education center: recycled plastic carpeting, recycled newspaper ceilings, “green” roof of native plants, and an exterior that looks like the bluffs below the Novitiate! All the materials were sourced within a 500-mile radius, making it LEED certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design,



the world's most widely used green building rating system).

While I was amazed by these recycling efforts, novices from “developing countries” had different responses. One novice reflected that he grew up familiar with re-using because in his country the less you have the better you learn to use your resources. Nothing was ever wasted - out of need. For example, when we saw a hot water heater on the building's roof, this novice commented that when his family needed hot water, his mother put a covered water bucket out in the sunshine to warm!

Another wise novice noted the deep connections we were learning about among the river, land and people. He commented that, no matter the presumed distance, what is done in one place affects the whole, including our spirits!

Finally, the young men from Zambia noted that where the USA is now, Zambia will be in 10 - 15 years, unless they learn from our mistakes and grow in another direction, one that is more sustainable and less destructive. With young, insightful spiritual leaders like these, I believe it will happen!

### **April 9: Workday in the Oblates Preserve 9:00 – 11:30 am**

Recently La Vista was blessed by the visit of students from Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They came to the area to do service with School Sisters of Notre Dame. It was a delight to work with them in the Oblates' Preserve where they picked up trash adjacent to the Great River Road and pulled the ever-present invasive honeysuckle.



The best part of their time here, though, was sharing in their enthusiasm for care of our common home. I was heartened by their deep awareness of the ecological crisis and their desire to make a difference.

If you would like to join in our efforts on April 9th, please let me know: 618-466-5004.

## April 7, 14, 21: Three Part Ecospirituality Series On Caring for Our Common Home

Location: Our Lady of the Snows Shrine, Belleville, IL

Ecospirituality is a way of living that reveals deep respect for our sacred planet Earth and makes us willing participants in its protection at this critical time. This series hopes to inspire a sense of wonder, awe, and gratitude and offer new perspectives on how we can deepen our compassion for the whole Earth community and act on its behalf.

Presenters: April 7 - Mark Etling, SLU theology professor; April 14 - Maxine Pohlman, SSND, Director of La Vista Learning Center; April 21 - Galen Gritts, member of the Cherokee Nation.

Registration through [Our Lady of the Snows](#)

## April 22: Earth Day: Planet vs Plastics

To achieve a 60% reduction of plastic by 2040, [EARTHDAY.ORG's](#) goals are:

- (1) promoting widespread public awareness of the damage done by plastic to human, animal, and all biodiversity's health and demanding more research be conducted on its health implications, including the release of any and all information regarding its effects to the public;
- (2) rapidly phasing out all single use plastics by 2030 and achieving this phase out commitment in the United Nations Treaty on Plastic Pollution in 2024;
- 3) demanding policies ending the scourge of fast fashion and the vast amount of plastic it produces and uses; and
- (4) investing in innovative technologies and materials to build a plastic-free world.

Each of us can join this effort at home as we examine our use of plastic. This is one very concrete way to care for our common home on Earth Day and every day! Visit their web site for ideas and inspiration.

Have an inspiring Earth Day celebration!



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