



## La Vista Ecological Learning Center

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A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

## E News and Ecospirituality Calendar

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

### Champions and Mentors



I have passed by this stately Basswood tree on the front lawn of the OMI Novitiate for twenty years without noticing it. It was Steve, our groundskeeper, and Bill, faithful volunteer, who took notice of its size and suggested that we nominate it to be an Illinois Big Tree Champion.

After measurements were taken and sent to the University of Illinois Extension, this Basswood, standing at 75' with a circumference of 13' 2.5" was certified as a state champion and will be added to the [Illinois Big Tree Register](#)!

As part of the certification process, a "verifier" came out to check on our measurements. While he was here, he noticed a line of Black Locust trees, planted as a windbreak alongside the drive. He knew that there is currently no black locust champion, so we measured a large one and nominated it. It also has been certified as an Illinois Big Tree Champion, standing at 77' with a 11'11" circumference and an average crown spread of 46'. We have to thank Mr. Levis for caring for the land by planting so many trees about 100 years ago!

Certification in the Big Tree Program means both trees will be featured on the Big Tree Register, and the Oblates will receive certificates. But, is recognition all there is to having a state champion? Obviously, there is a greater value to big trees, for they have provided many ecosystem services for a very long time.

Think about how much carbon is sequestered over a lifetime by big trees, helping regulate climate. Consider how much water is absorbed and stored by big trees, recharging groundwater and

reducing runoff.

Imagine how many squirrels, chipmunks, mice, and songbirds have fed on Basswood seeds; how many white-tailed deer have foraged on the buds and stems; the amount of bees that have gathered nectar from the lovely, abundant flowers in the springtime!

One has to wonder how many owls and songbirds have found shelter in their wide canopies over the years and how many insects have lived in the bark. How many millions of leaves have fallen from these trees, enriching the soil and providing habitat for insects!

The question comes to mind again, is there more to it than recognition and ecosystem services? Of course, and Mary Oliver says it so well in her poem "When I Am Among the Trees". She tells us they give off hints of gladness and save her, daily! She shares their words, "Around me the trees stir in their leaves and call out, 'Stay awhile'. The light flows from their branches. And they call again, 'It's simple,' they say, 'and you too have come into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.'

When we step out of our human supremacy and listen for revelation from trees, they become our mentors, inspiring us to live long and gracious lives in service to others.

## Reflection on September's "Field Trip" with OMI Novices

Each month we are focusing on a different aspect of the call to ecological conversion, and September's was "from a throwaway culture toward environmental responsibility".



Both the encyclical *Laudato Si* and the August, 2023 letter of the OMI General Superior specifically call for *avoidance of or a reduction* in our use of plastic, so we spent our time learning why this issue is such a harmful one both for human health and the health of the planet and what it means to act in an environmentally responsible way.

After the animated short film "[The Story of Plastic](#)", we viewed the very sobering documentary "[We're All Plastic People Now](#)". As someone who lived some years before plastic became omnipresent on our planet, I really had no idea what the plastic crisis meant to people whose entire lives have been spent within this reality. Shocking and frustrated are two words used in response to the film. Along with their serious dismay was an equally strong desire to make a difference.



One special moment for us in the documentary was when it described Pope Francis as one of the few "politicians" addressing the crisis. Francis was quoted as saying, "We will all go into the future or no one goes", pointing out the global urgency of this crisis and our unity on our threatened planet.

Then, at lunch, all of us found ourselves pointing out how pervasive plastic is on our tables, in the packaging of our food, and in microwaving meals. One novice, biting into an apple freshly picked from a tree, quoted the movie saying that there are plastics even in our apples!

The OMI General Superior calls the OMI family to action on an environmental issue, and I can imagine that monitoring and reducing the use of plastic may be one of the places they focus their efforts this Novitiate year - and into the future.

Photo: L to R: Novices Edwin Silwimba, Alfred Lungu, Mike Katona, and Eliakim Mbenda.

## October 4: Feast of St. Francis of Assisi and Conclusion of the Season of Creation

The Catholic Climate Covenant invites all of us to celebrate the feast day by hosting a special event. This [guide](#) will help you to organize an educational event designed to encourage us to be people of peace who do not let "our concerns and struggles for our planet take away the joy of our hope". (Laudato Si)

October 1, 15, 22, 29 Workdays  
in Pollinator Garden  
October 8 Workday in the  
Oblate Preserve  
9:00 – 11:30 am

We often get help with honeysuckle removal from the "Habitat Strike Team" who come to us through a collaboration of Lewis and Clark Community College and the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center. To get a sense of how this group helps us and others in our area restore a forest to health, watch this [informative three and a half minute video](#).



Help is always welcome!. Let us know if you can participate. We have plenty of tools and would enjoy working with you. Leave a message at 618-466-5004.

## October 14: Indigenous Peoples' Day (Columbus Day)

In 2021 President Biden officially recognized Indigenous Peoples' Day. Learn more by reading "[Unlearning Columbus Day Myths: Celebrating Indigenous Peoples' Day](#)" as well as this excellent article: [Rethinking How We Celebrate American History - Indigenous Peoples' Day](#).

### Resources

[Creation Justice Ministries: Old Growth forests](#) Learn about Old Growth Forests, download a fact sheet, find a poem and a prayer on this site as you deepen your appreciation for old trees.

"Of Ants and Men" - a PBS documentary about the life and extraordinary journey of one of America's great scientists, E.O. Wilson. It is an endearing portrait of a remarkable man often called "a Darwin for the modern day", chronicling Wilson's lifelong love for the natural world that led him to Harvard and to studies that would establish him as the world's foremost authority on ants. Enjoy this very uplifting and informative video.

[Contemporary Icons of Threatened & Endangered Species](#) Artist Angela Manno sees Light in every creature, especially in those we may lose. Painted as icons, these beings reveal their inner light, inviting us to embrace Manno's sacred vision. It is this kind of vision that will help heal our planet and protect biodiversity.



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