



## La Vista Ecological Learning Center

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A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

## E News and Ecospirituality Calendar

September, 2024

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

### Let There Be Night!



This picture taken from my home in Godfrey, Illinois, came to mind as I listened to a webinar about light pollution. The speaker didn't hold back, warning of the danger to life - all life - as we light up the planet. I appreciated his putting this critical issue into context, since it is a contributor to the ongoing biodiversity crisis.

#### Context

In 1962 Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, warning us of the danger of widespread pesticide use, an unquestioned practice at the time. Following her lead, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency was established, and in 1972 it banned the use of DDT due to overuse and harmful impact on the planet. The environmental movement began, and our consciousness was raised.

In 2009 Doug Tallamy also broke new ground with his book *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*, which made the connection between biodiversity loss and our gardens. Imagine! Until then it was unthought of that the kind of flowers we chose had an effect on biodiversity. We weren't aware that insects need the plants they evolved with rather those brought into an area from elsewhere. Now groups like [Grow Native!](#) are proliferating, and even some highway medians are being planted with natives. Another step forward on the road to recovery as our consciousness was raised again.

In 2020 Tallamy continued waking us up. In *Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard*, he challenged America's love of turf grass, pointing out that it provides no ecological benefits. He encouraged reducing lawn size by half and planting it with native flowers, shrubs, and trees if we want to stop the collapse of biodiversity. A doable effort to stem the crisis,

and our consciousness continued to expand.

## Light Pollution

After setting this context, in the webinar "[Dark Sky as a Natural Resource](#)", Dr. Vayujeet Gokhale illuminated participants with a call to realize the harm of extreme light pollution in this country. Just as with pesticides, non-native plants, and turf grass, our overlooked lighting up the night skies is contributing to the biodiversity crisis. Artificial light negatively impacts insects as well as turtles, seabirds, shorebirds, and ecosystems in general. It also has a detrimental impact on human health.

Among other informative and challenging messages, Dr. Gokhale offered five principles for outdoor lighting:

1. Use only when needed.
2. Target the area.
3. Use no brighter lighting than necessary.
4. Use controlled-motion sensors.
5. Use warm-colored lighting where possible.

Gokhale's overall rule of thumb: efficiency versus over-consumption!

## Motivation

For a more poetic motivational voice, savor a thought from John Burroughs, naturalist and essayist: *If I had my life to live over again and had my choice of celestial abodes, I am sure I should take this planet... This great rolling sphere with its sky, its stars, its sunrises and sunsets, and with its outlook into infinity — what could be more desirable? What more satisfying? Garlanded by the seasons... thrilling with life, with a heart of fire and a garment of azure seas, and fruitful continents — one might ransack the heavens in vain for a better or a more picturesque abode.*

Protecting our dark skies by reducing light pollution will do much to ensure our "outlook into infinity" as well as an Earth "thrilling with life", "azure seas", and "fruitful continents". Please share this information and consider joining [Dark Sky International](#).

## August's *Laudato Si* Meeting with OMI Novices

We welcome this year's novices, L to R: Michael Katona (USA), Alfred Lungu (Zambia), Edwin Silwimba (Zambia), Eliakim Mbenda (Namibia). During their Novitiate year La Vista will help them to explore the call to ecological conversion as it comes to us through Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* and is



reiterated by the OMI's 37th General Chapter which states, "We are thus challenged to commit ourselves more fully to prioritize ecological conversion as a fundamental part of our lives and an integral part of our evangelization". (11.1)

Each month we'll investigate what ecological conversion looks like in practice through field trips, documentaries, and in dialogue with Oblates who are living the call to ecological conversion in unique ways.

Our first exploration was right here at the Novitiate as we familiarized ourselves with the uniqueness of the 255 acres the novices will call home for the next year; consequently we considered this aspect of the call to ecological conversion:

### **from excessive anthropocentrism to responsible stewardship (Laudato Si, 116)**

We hiked the land to see the results of OMI's farsighted actions, since Oblates responded to this call long before *Laudato Si* was published:

1993 - 16 acres dedicated as the Missionary Oblates Woods Nature Preserve

2001 - 143 acres dedicated in the Forest Legacy Program

2014 - Pollinator Garden was planted

Land dedicated in 1993 and 2001 was by legal contract, curtailing human activity in favor of ensuring the integrity of the ecosystem in perpetuity. In the photo Novices are pictured in the Oblate Woods Nature Preserve by a sign which reads: *All plants, animals and other natural features within this area are protected by law. Weapons, vehicles, pets, horses, and camping are prohibited.* Through this dedication the land and its inhabitants now have a voice!

We also viewed [\*The Rights of Nature\*](#), a TEDx talk by Sister Patricia Siemen, OP, Director of the Center for Earth Jurisprudence at the Barry University School of Law. She helped us to understand the inherent rights of all creatures and land as more than inert matter; rather, as a sacred community of soils, animals, bluffs, waters, woods and human beings. Her sixteen minute presentation was well worth our time! One novice had an awakening moment during her talk when he noted that we give legal rights to corporations in the spirit of capitalism; should we not also give legal rights to other members of the Earth community?

My hope is that these four remarkable young men will carry this call into their future ministries and they care for our common home wherever they are sent.



A Natural Areas Stewardship Grant has been awarded to three Preserves along the bluff corridor, including the Oblates Nature Preserve! Acquiring this grant was a collaborative effort among the Great Rivers Land Trust, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center, and La Vista. Funds will make it possible for progress in restoring ecological health on sites in the bluff corridor.

Our monthly efforts to remove invasive species will get a big boost since the funds locally will be used for contractual work to remove large honeysuckle as well as some follow up on other areas treated. We are so grateful!

**September 3,17,24 Workdays in Pollinator Garden**  
**September 10 in Oblate Preserve**  
**9:00 – 11:30 am**

Help is always welcome! Let us know if you plan on participating. We have plenty of tools and enjoy camaraderie.  
618-466-5004.

**September 21: Celebrate the Autumnal Equinox and a Special Tree**  
**2:00 – 4:00 PM**

The Olympics warmed our hearts this summer with a great variety of human champions. Now we have an opportunity to spotlight other champions among us that receive less acclaim. The Missionary Oblates are on the cusp of being recognized for having a tree champion on their front lawn! Join us as we welcome the autumn season and celebrate the Basswood tree, recently nominated to be named one of [Illinois' largest native trees.](#)



We'll learn how the tree was identified and nominated as we rejoice in all of autumn's magnificent trees. Please bring tree-themed poetry/music/art to help us celebrate these members of our Earth community.

Registration: Use this email address to let us know you are coming:  
[info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org)  
Thanks for bringing a snack to share; drinks will be provided.

If you cannot join us, visit the [National Register of Champion Trees](#) to see if you can find one in your area.



## September 25: Start of Online Book Discussion 12:30 – 1:30 PM

This fall we'll use John Philip Newell's latest book, [The Great Search: Turning to Earth and Soul in the Quest for Healing and Home](#) for our online discussion. In this book Newell invites readers to listen to nine

prophetic figures addressing the spiritual yearnings of today when the very future of humanity's relationship with Earth is imperiled. Each one shows us that living in relation to what is deepest in us IS living in relation to the ground from which we and all things have come.

Registration via email: [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org). Please include your name and preferred email address. We will meet weekly on Wednesdays from 12:30 - 1:30 pm. Upon registration, a list of subsequent meeting dates and a Zoom link will be sent via email.

The book is available for purchase online.

Photo credit: Matthew Kalapuch on Unsplash

## Resources

“[Northern Lights, Starry Skies](#)” is a beautiful, free PBS documentary celebrating amazing starry skies above the world's largest designated Dark Sky Sanctuary. Ojibwe, Dakota cultural astronomers, and other experts share the wonders of the heavens and illuminate ways we can reduce the negative impacts of light pollution. (56 minutes)

[Creation Justice Ministries: Save Old Growth forests](#) – advocate for forests by signing a letter.

[Season of Creation](#) September 1 - October 4 An Invitation - During this Season of Creation, [Ministry of the Arts](#) (MOTA) encourages you to:

- Visit our [Laudato Si category on our MOTA website](#) for inspiring artwork and music
- Download and print a free [Laudato Si ACT NOW postcard](#) to send as a thank you to those who are actively advocating for change *OR* as a call to action to those in charge to do more in protecting our planet. *\*Printing instructions can be found on our website.*
- Listen to our [Season of Creation Spotify Playlist](#) with songs by Sr. Kathy Sherman. *\*For music, lyrics, and sheet music requests email [mota@csjoseph.org](mailto:mota@csjoseph.org).*



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