



La Vista Ecological Learning Center

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A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation

E News and Eco-spirituality Calendar

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

April - Blessed by an Ethical Beekeeper



David Brantley, beekeeper of 20 hives on the Novitiate land, arrived at La Vista's Spring Equinox Celebration with his sons, an observation hive, a smoker, his bee suit, and a heart full of the love of bees. When he started talking, all those gathered knew we were in for an inspiring presentation.

I expected to learn about how incredible bees are, and I was not disappointed. For example, David shared that the Queen Bee is mother of all the bees in the hive and sets the temperament of the hive. Even though she sees daylight only once in her life, during her mating flight, she begins decreasing egg production at the winter solstice and increasing it at the spring equinox, laying thousands of eggs daily! What participation in the great mystery of life!

What I did not expect to learn was the ins and outs of [ethical beekeeping](#) which came up repeatedly during his talk. "I brought along a smoker to show you because it is iconic; however, I never use it as it hinders bees' sense of smell. Would you like to have smoke blown in your face?", he gently queried. Instead, he gets to know his bees so well that they allow him to do his work without having to be quieted with smoke. He has a relationship with his bees, and he listens to them; if they don't want him around, he backs off. He has learned to *feel and hear* the temperament of bees.

One participant asked about the ethics of eating honey because it means taking it away from the hive. David shared that bees produce three times more honey than they need for a healthy hive.

He makes sure to harvest only the excess and never more. He even feeds them extra in the winter to make sure they have what they need. He told us that beekeeping is a side interest for him and not his main line of work. He tried to do it full time, but he found himself doing things he considered unethical in order to make a living, so he quit, doing it now because of his love of bees.

David explained that early spring is a dangerous time for bees since the warm weather causes them to fly out of the hive when there is not much pollen or nectar to gather. They could return to the hive exhausted and die. He said that manicured lawns are the death of bees since they remove what does bloom early – dandelions. Bees rely on these natives, especially in early spring. We concluded and agreed that if you care about wildlife, a manicured lawn is on the unethical side of the equation.

We came to see that ethical, sustainable beekeeping is a serious responsibility because it calls for treating the hives with respect and care as well as putting their health and the health of the ecosystem above any kind of profit and even the personal convenience of the keeper.

After his presentation David didn't stay for snacks; rather, he headed for home so the bees could get outside before dark.



David's presentation was an example of what James Hollis calls "humbling service of the mystery". The queen, workers, drones, guards, and our ethical beekeeper, all giving service to the Great Mystery, the foundation and inspiration for our lives as members of the Earth community. When I asked him about beekeeping as a sacred experience, he responded with hearty agreement, "Oh, yeah, it makes me feel part of something much bigger than myself!"

May you also be blessed as you continue to give your own humbling service to the Great Mystery!

(A suggestion: get your honey from a local farmers' market. In our area you can purchase David's "Sweet Acres" honey at the Brighton farmers' market on Thursdays from 4 - 7 beginning in June.)

Reflection on March Ecological Conversion Session with OMI Novices

For our final session this "year" we stayed at home so we could connect with Francois Balga Goldong, a

remarkable OMI brother who is from Cameroon and is currently studying in the Philippines.

After viewing the documentary [*Fleeing Climate Change: the Real Environmental Disaster*](#),

Francois was so moved that he felt impelled to write his thoughts in an article he entitled "The Urgent Mission of Religious Congregations in Caring for the Earth". We viewed the video and were also moved by the way that rising sea levels in Indonesia, melting permafrost in the Arctic, extreme heat and drought in Cameroon, and desertification in the Sahel, are resulting in the mass migration of, "climate migrants". Francois told us he is familiar with the crisis, having experienced heat and drought in Cameroon. He shared that he was now experiencing climate change effects in the Philippines in the form of flooding from rising seas levels and increased intensity of typhoons.



The novices were all ears when Francois spoke, since he is close to their age, has experienced climate change first hand, and had the courage to challenge the Congregation to a deeper response to the climate crisis. He said, "The documentary...presents a stark reality: entire communities are being uprooted due to ecological degradation. As I reflect on this I feel compelled to explore whether ecological justice should be considered an essential part of our missionary identity, even if it has not traditionally been emphasized within our charism".

Even though it was the wee hours of the morning in the Philippines, Francois had the energy to share the urgency he feels about the many people around the world who are facing climate migration, saying, "The question is not whether we should act, but how we will act. If we, as religious, do not take this crisis seriously, who will? We cannot afford to delay, for the earth and its most vulnerable inhabitants are crying out for justice. By embracing this call, we as Oblates will continue to be true to our missionary identity bringing hope to the most vulnerable and witnessing to God's love in a world in crisis."

We ended our time feeling blessed by the witness of a young Oblate who is tuned in to the reality of the climate crisis and who had the courage to write his thoughts, resulting in our meeting across the miles and supporting one another.



Since we met in March, Brother Francois has also written "[The Three 'H', Integrating 'Head, Heart, and Hands': A New Culture of Response to Ecological Conversion](#)". I invite you to support him by reading his inspiring article and enjoying the photo of his garden, pictured here.

Above photo, L to R: Edwin Silwimba, Alfred Lungu, Bro. Francois, Mike Katona, Eliakim Mbenda



Mount Mary University Student Service Days

On March 6 and 7 La Vista hosted four young women from [Mount Mary University](#), a School Sister of Notre Dame sponsored university in Milwaukee. They spilled out of their car ready to work, and work they did! I was amazed at their enthusiasm and

willingness to do hard, dirty tasks.

They dug and tugged, and succeeded in pulling out several tires that had been tossed into the Oblates' Nature Preserve and buried for years in the soil. They weeded and mulched a garden and cleared a stone wall of debris. Then they cleaned out a storage area that had been neglected for years. When I asked if they needed a rest, together they said, "No, we want to work!"

Beyond the significant amount of work they did, what was even better was what they learned about themselves. "I didn't know I am strong!" "I never get my hands dirty, but this feels great!"

I was also impressed with how they became a team as they addressed challenges, collaborated on solutions, and succeeded in their tasks.

Working with them was a learning experience and *a true pleasure* for them and for me.





April 8: Workday in the Oblates Preserve 9:00 - 11:30 am

It was mid-March and nearing the end of burn season when a crew of fifteen gathered to carry out a [prescribed burn](#) on ten of the sixteen acres in the Oblates Nature Preserve. Burning is a maintenance technique that restores health to

an ecosystem dependent on fire. It reaps many benefits such as removing old vegetation to promote growth of native trees and wildflowers; improving habitat for threatened and endangered species; recycling nutrients back into the soil; consuming excess fuel, reducing threat of wildfires.

A heartfelt thank you to each member of the crew!

If you would like to join us for our next workday, please let me know by calling 618-466-5004.

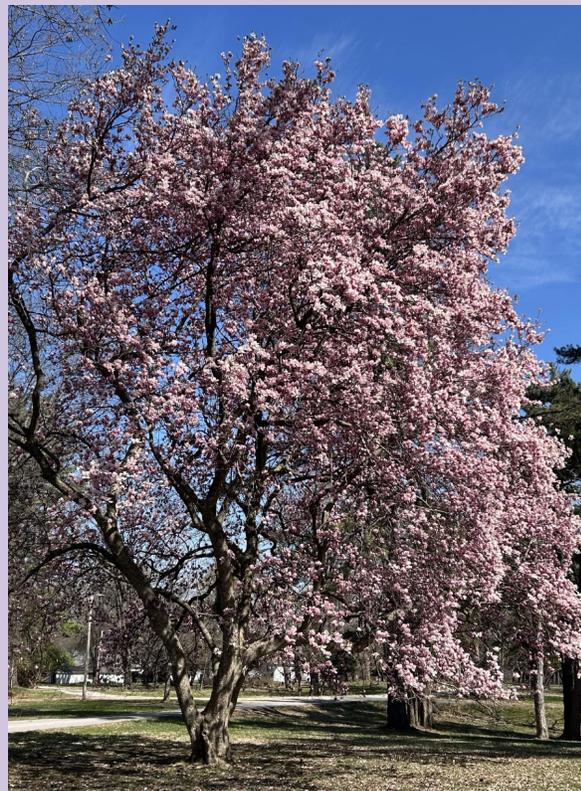


April 20: Easter Sunday

We need Easter's marvelous message of resurrection and new beginnings now more than ever. Our environmental crisis may feel overwhelming, and it is; however, the hope we feel as we celebrate Easter gives us the courage to continue our actions on behalf of the whole Earth Community.

I felt the joy of Easter throughout Lent this year as I met our ethical beekeeper David, our youthful OMI Brother Francois, our energetic young women from Mount Mary, and our dedicated fire crew. They make it easy for me to take to

heart Pope Francis's words in the conclusion of *Laudato Si'*: "May our struggles and our concerns for this planet never take away the joy of our hope" (244). May your Easter celebration also be full of hope and joy! (Photo: Magnolia on front drive of OMI Novitiate)



Resources

[Earth Day](#)

The official Earth Day web site offers [several quizzes](#) to motivate us to learn and act on a variety of topics, including: Ending Plastics, Climate and Emissions, Individual Action, Conservation and Restoration. The quizzes are challenging and informative, and they will raise your awareness. Completing these alone, with a friend, or in a group would be a great way to spend time on Earth Day.

[Thomas Berry: A Book of Hours by Kathleen Deignan](#)

This Book of Hours includes prayers, hymns and readings for the four parts of a day; Dawn, Day, Dusk, and Dark. What a lovely way to move intentionally and prayerfully through each day in the spirit of Thomas Berry who calls us to participate in the restoration of our sacred and precious planet Earth! The link above takes you to Orbis Books and is an encouragement to support book sellers directly instead of using Amazon. Better yet, order through your local bookstore.

[I'm a Vet for Bees](#) Click on the title and enjoy this short, inspiring article from *The Guardian* by a veterinarian who just may be the only vet for bees in the world. She writes, "Every bee is precious, and as the weather gets more erratic I'm growing concerned about the effect it is having on their wellbeing."

[Swedish Couple Builds Greenhouse Around Home to Stay Warm and Grow Food All Year Long](#)

Ready for some hopefulness? Read this article!



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