



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

May, 2025

Maxine Pohlman, SSND

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

May - Heartfelt Reflections from OMI Novices

La Vista joins all those on our planet who are feeling the great loss of Pope Francis who heard the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and acted on what he heard in a most remarkable way. This Novitiate year we have been immersed in his words as they come to us in his encyclical *Laudato Si*. As we ended our time together here at Immaculate Heart of Mary Novitiate in April, the Novices offered to share their thoughts about ecological conversion as described in *Laudato Si*. May their words honor the memory of Pope Francis.



A Dialogue with Earth by Edwin Silwimba

Over the past seven months at La Vista Ecological Learning Center through the classes we had with Sister Maxine, I had an opportunity to talk to Earth and learn from Earth how to care for him/her better, how to love him/her and how to be a better steward for the gifts Earth gives me. The task is to carry this enlightenment to wherever I go in my ministry as a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate. My article is written in the form of a personal conversation between Edwin and Earth.

Edwin: I feel different now. I mean... I will see you differently. For the longest time, I looked at you from afar; your trees, rivers, animals, beautiful, yes, but distant. I never really heard your voice.

Earth (smiling): And now?

Edwin: Now I hear your sighs when I walk on dry, cracked soil. I feel your joy in birdsong and your grief in polluted skies. Seven months ago, I wouldn't have noticed. But La Vista Ecological Learning

Center changed me.

Earth: Tell me about it. What did they teach you?

Edwin: They taught me to pay attention to listening with more than just ears. I learned how ecosystems breathe together like a single body. I learned about sustainability, conservation, native plants, and waste reduction. But more than facts, they taught me relationships. That I'm not outside of you... I'm part of you.

Earth (gently): And you came all the way from Zambia for this?

Edwin (with a smile): Yes. I came from the heart of Africa, where the soil is red and warm, where the rain nourishes maize fields, and where I played barefoot as a child. I loved you then, but I didn't know how deep that love could go. I didn't know how much you needed me to care for them with intention.

Earth: You've always belonged to me, but now you've chosen to *belong with me*, and that's different.

Edwin: Exactly. Stewardship isn't just about duty anymore. It's about kinship. I've started seeing my small daily actions as seeds. What I throw away, what I plant, how I use energy, it all speaks to how I love you.

Edwin (nodding): Yes. That's what *Laudato Si'* says, right? "*Our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.*"

Earth (softly): I have always been both sister and mother. And yet many forget.

Edwin: I was one of them. But now, I've begun to see you not just as 'environment,' but as a sacred presence. I've stopped asking, "What can I take?" and started asking, "How can I give back?"

Earth: Then you are living *integral ecology* where care for creation is one with care for people and with the life of the spirit.

Edwin: Yes. I still have much to learn, but I know now that to be a good steward is to walk humbly, love deeply, and act wisely. Now I'll plant consciousness with a new heart. I want to share what I've learned with my brothers, my community. I want to walk more gently and help others see that you are not just a backdrop to our lives, but a sacred companion.

Earth (softly): That is enough to begin healing.

Edwin: Thank you, Earth for your patience. For never giving up on us.

Earth: And thank you for listening.

Ecological Encounter by Michael Katona

I grew up in Colorado, and unsurprisingly I'm a fan of hiking and find spending time in nature to be enjoyable, comforting, and fulfilling. Exploring the woods on our property, I've often found empty drink cans, coffee cups, and fast-food boxes – signs of people treating Earth as nothing more than a place to enjoy, wreck, then expect someone else to take care of.



I've also seen evidence of people treating Creation as something valuable, as something to be preserved and cared for. In addition to the folks who root out invasive honeysuckle, remove trash or help facilitate controlled burns, I am particularly moved and impressed by the person (or people) who placed thumb tacks as trail markers to help others find their way to the Cross overlooking the bluffs. I can't help but think they had a special connection to this trail and wanted to share it with others.

In his 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis uses the phrase "ecological conversion," which has served as the basis of our monthly classes with Sr. Maxine Pohlman. He describes part of this conversion as allowing *the effects of our encounter with Jesus Christ to become evident in our relationship with the world around us* (#217). To me, it seems rather straightforward: if we want real "ecological conversion," we need real "ecological encounter." I question if the folks who leave their garbage in the woods have had a meaningful encounter with Creation – a time we become aware of just how precious and comforting and magnificent Earth really is, and how at-home we are when we're close to her. I'm thankful for these ecological encounters in my life, and I'd be willing to bet most folks who subscribe to this newsletter are, too. We've received a piece of the Good News through these encounters, and I'd pose to you the same question I ask myself:

How can we, just like the person putting up those trail markers, help others find their way to their own meaningful encounter with Earth?

Being in Solidarity with the Poor by Eliakim Mbenda

My novitiate period here in Godfrey has been a wonderful experience. Sister Maxine has been of great help in giving us classes on Ecological Spirituality and helping us understand the importance of taking care of our environment (our property). She also took time to explain to us the encyclical document *Laudato Si* of Pope Francis, which I dearly love and respect.



What we call our common home is quite simple and natural. These are plants, animals, water, land and air. Taking care of our common home is our primary purpose of being on earth. God created us so that we may care for nature and in return nature may also care for us. It is a fact that we as human beings are sustained by the common home, which we neglect to care for and protect.

The common home is being damaged by ourselves due to lack of care and concern. And so, the same treatment is what we are transferring to ourselves, which is lack of care for one another. When we are damaging the common home, we are causing harm to the poor, our brothers and sisters. This is happening because we are putting profit at the center of our journey. Instead, profit should not be at the center, but stay sustainable without causing damage to the water, land, air, plants and animals. This means that we should learn how to live wisely as a society not as an individual and learn how to work jointly with others. because when we do things just to feed our ego, we make our brothers and sisters who are less privileged to suffer more and more. Giving care to the land, water, plants and air is giving care and support to the poor.

It will be of greater help if we shift our mindset for something greater or for a mission. This means that we should avoid selfishness, because selfishness leads to the evaporation of the notion of the common good. We should change our mindsets from knowing everything to the mind that is able and willing to learn from other people. There is greater knowledge in learning from others. We should shift our minds of individual interest to the minds of the common purpose. We should move from being strong to the minds that shows vulnerability, compassion and humility. This means that we should give respect to the environment where we live. When the environment and everything that surround it is respected, then every person, poor or rich, is respected and protected as well.



A Personal Reflection by Alfred Lungu

Finding our purpose can be hard today. Have we taken time to wonder about our role in the world and how we relate to people, nature, and animals? Why are humans so important on this planet? We need to think about this. Because some of our brothers and sisters have left this beautiful planet without resolving these problems.

It's not too late to change how we see things. We can build a world that helps all life. What we do affects the Earth and other creatures. Nature and its animals are part of our world too. It's wrong to treat them like they're just for us to use (essential commodities). In fact, Pope Francis, calls them "Our brothers and sisters." It's upsetting to see how we ignore other species to get rich. If money drives these actions, we need to rethink things. We all have a job to protect the Earth. It's not ours forever; future generations will get it. So, we must make a safe and good place for them. If we don't care

for our planet, the damage can't be fixed.

Everything in creation matters—nature, animals, and people. We must respect all life. Money is important, but we shouldn't treat other living things like objects to be used and trashed. We need to think about why we're here and make sure our actions protect the Earth.

The Lodge Receives a Visitor

Readers who have visited the Lodge at La Vista will remember it as a remarkable structure by anyone's estimation. We are blessed to hold solstice and equinox celebrations there, and novices sometimes choose to spend their "desert days" there, since the quiet and the view invite relationship with what is much bigger than ourselves.



It was designed in 1934 by a renowned St. Louis architect Preston Bradshaw, who planned several of the grand hotels in downtown St. Louis like the Chase Park Plaza and the Coronado. When he created the plans for this little building perched on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River, Bradshaw was truly designing out-of-the-box. He chose local rock, oak beams, and slate flooring, making it feel so right as one enjoys the view.

In early April, Bradshaw's granddaughter, Christy Bradshaw Mason, pictured on the right, contacted La Vista wondering if she could come for a tour since she was visiting in St. Louis and had never been in the Lodge. Her visit was delight-full; she was full of delight as she experienced the feel of the rustic building, and I was delighted in her reactions.

Read more about the Lodge in an [article from the Alton Telegraph](#) written by La Vista's friend, architect John Guenther, who found it so alluring that he researched the building extensively.

May 13: Workday in the Oblates Woods Nature Preserve 9:00 - Noon

Please join us for our May workday when we will pick up trash from the decades-old dump site pictured here. We will be joined by employees from ARF Solar who



are sharing their "service day" with us!!!

Thanks for letting me know if you can help out. 618-466-5004

Resources

Pope Francis was a Jesuit, so it is an appropriate time to offer an ecological resource spearheaded by Jesuits that truly reflects his spirit. The "[Healing Earth](#)" initiative is a free online environmental science textbook and project that promotes both ecological conversion and action for a healthy planet. It's designed for secondary school, college, and adult learners, offering an interdisciplinary approach to environmental issues. In addition to scientific knowledge, the resource includes ideas for ethical action and spiritual reflection. Its perspective is global, drawing from examples around the world. Use it for your own learning or with a group - you won't be disappointed.

[Zero-Waste Chef](#) is a web site full of practical ideas for eliminating waste in your kitchen, and it includes gardening tips, recipes, and motivating challenges for more sustainable living.



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