



La Vista Ecological Learning Center

A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

January 1, 2020

E-News

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January, 2020 Eco-spirituality Calendar

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Don't miss the Winter/Spring issue of La Vista Visions!
Click here to open. [ed_2_Winter Spring 2020 Newsletter.pdf](#)

January: Lovin' Lichen and Contemplative Ecology



I recently moved residences, and now during my morning spiritual practice I find myself looking out at an oak tree adjacent to a bird sanctuary. The predominant colors in January are gray and brown except for the patterned shades of green and gray lichen I observed growing up the oak's trunk. As I spent time with them, the lichen became beautiful to me in the wintry bleakness. Soon they captured my attention entirely, and I felt as glued to them as they were fixed onto the bark. Mary Oliver's words in her poem *Terns* rose up from my memory. "But nothing

you ever understand will be sweeter, or more binding, than this deepest affinity between your eyes and the world".

Still, I wanted to understand this life form as a way to get to the bottom of this intense draw, *this deepest affinity*. What I learned is that lichen exist because of a successful relationship among alga and fungi; in other words they are an alliance of life forms. As a partnership, they exist; separately they cannot survive. They also need a "substrate" to grow on - like a rock or a tree. And here they are in my back yard, one of the oldest organisms on Earth, millions of years old!

The allure deepened when I realized lichen are a living example of

the truth we hear from every corner during these days of crisis on our planet: ecology tells us that in Earth's household everything is connected; Thomas Berry says Nothing is itself without everything else; John Muir's take on it is: *When you tug on anything in the universe you find it tied to everything else*; and in Jesus' words, *Whatever you do to the least...you do to me*.

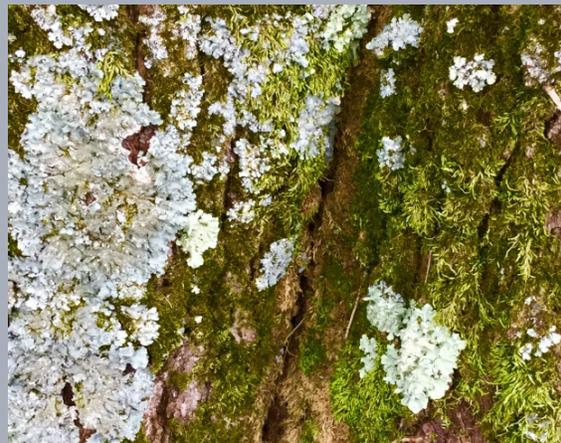
For a long time I have believed that the ecological crisis is at its root a spiritual crisis, and when I came upon Douglas Christie's book *Blue Sapphire of the Mind: Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*, the deeper meaning of that belief emerged. Christie tells us, "Contemplative ecology can best be understood as an expression of the diverse and wide-ranging desire emerging within contemporary culture to identify our deepest feeling for the natural world as part of a spiritual longing."

Putting the name "contemplative ecology" on my spiritual longing was enlightening and accurate! I hope it is helpful to you, too. I recommend reading his book which is a needed aid in naming and embracing what Thomas Berry calls "the spirituality of Earth". That Christie does this within the Christian contemplative tradition makes the book itself a blue sapphire!

Wednesday, January 1 Hikin' for Lichen on New Year's Day

This is a good day to remember that spiritual practice needs to go beyond sitting in silence and solitude; it longs to include action, or on January first, resolutions!

My research revealed that lichen is a good indicator of air quality since many lichen are sensitive to air pollution. So, if there is no lichen in your area, your air quality is likely poor, and if you have one kind only a little better, but if you have three kinds you are breathing healthy air.



Lichen come in three varieties: crusty (crustose) leafy (foliose) and shrunken (fruticose). Can you find them in this photo?

Curious about your air quality? Take time to go hikin' for lichen on this first day of the new year. Look in places where lichen may grow, such as trees, rocks, roofs, gravestones, even soil! Note the differences. Do you see one, two or three different kinds? Assess your air quality, then make a resolution on behalf of our lovely lichens: cease

the practice of idling your car! "Every 10 minutes of idling you cut from your life, you'll save one pound of carbon dioxide - a harmful greenhouse gas - from being released into the atmosphere," according to EcoWatch. What a simple and important action to take on behalf of our lovely lichens (and ourselves)! So, no more idling at the bank, in your driveway listening to NPR, or tending your GPS before starting a trip. Encourage your friends to do this, too, and have a happy new year!

Climate Fiction Book Club January 3 6:30 - 8:30 pm

Ishmael: An Adventure of Mind and Spirit by Daniel Quinn is an excellent choice for this month's book club. *Ishmael*, a thousand-pound gorilla, becomes the teacher urging the narrator and readers to wake up and end our culture's war on Earth. To participate please read this unusual novel and come ready to engage in a stimulating conversation. You will enjoy a beautiful setting, creative literature and good company!



Afterwords Book Store (Photo by Toni Oplt)

Place: *Afterwords Book Store 441 East Vandalia Street,
Edwardsville, IL 62025*

Registration: Call 618-466-5004

Sponsored by: Confluence Climate Collaborative

January 6 Feast of Epiphany

One way we celebrate this feast is by reading the biblical story of Jesus being manifested to three sages from the East. What a great reminder to open our eyes so we may see the divine in unexpected places. According to William Blake, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear to us as it is, "infinite". For we have closed ourselves up 'til we see all through the narrow chinks of our cavern."

On this feast day, let's long for healing. May each of us enjoy a fuller,

more encompassing vision of reality that becomes a part of the fabric of our being. And as our perspective is healed, we will also be tending the suffering of Earth, for all is truly one.

Reconnecting with Earth: A Six-Session Discussion Course
Tuesdays 1/21, 2/4, 2/18, 3/3, 3/17, 3/31 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Our current cultural worldview places little value on soil, air, water or animals, and so we have become disconnected from the source of our life. Pollution of the elements, desertification, and climate change are a few results of our alienation from Earth. The inspiring readings in this course challenge that worldview and show us how to move forward. You will read selections from environmental and conservation authors like Rachel Carson, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard, Terry Tempest Williams and Wendell Berry. These authors are deeply connected with Earth, and their writings evoke respect for our planet along with a renewed commitment to act on Earth's behalf.

Cost: \$30 for the discussion book which you can order online: www.nwei.org If you would like to make a donation to La Vista for hosting this course, that would be appreciated. You can also view the first session online to see if you are interested.

Winterfires Coffeehouse
Saturday, January 25 7:00 - 9:00 pm

Hot chocolate, coffee, camaraderie around a fire - what sounds more appealing on a cold winter's night? The spontaneous nature of this gathering always provides surprise and delight in human creativity. Along with your original or found poetry, stories, music and song, please bring a snack to share. We'll provide drinks.

Cost: Thanks for bringing a donation to support La Vista's programming. Your generosity is greatly appreciated.

Registration: Email info@lavistaelc.org or call 618- 466-5004.



