



## La Vista Ecological Learning Center

A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate  
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### E-News and Eco-spirituality Calendar

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Monthly reflections are archived in the Blog on our web site.

## November and The Honorable Harvest



During November box turtles start digging burrows to descend into for the winter. Their habitat includes dry prairies and other open areas with sandy soils, allowing them to do this deep burrowing so they can avoid freezing. Their range is small, an area the size of two football fields. These amazing beings have been on this planet for over 200 million years. The ornate box turtle, pictured here, is one of only two terrestrial species native to the great plains of the United States, and this special turtle is listed as *threatened* in Illinois and *of concern and protected* in six other Midwestern states. I became intrigued by the humble box turtle during a compelling online presentation and discussion in October when Devin Edmonds spoke in

response to an invitation of the Sierra Club's Coal Mining Issues Team. More about that later.

Edmonds enthusiastically shared his love of turtles and then asked participants if we could name the cause of their decline, offering possibilities like *climate change*, *habitat loss*, *over-harvesting*, *predation*, and *road mortality*. I was inclined to say habitat loss and was chagrined to learn that *over-harvesting for the pet trade* was the number one cause! So, after 200 million years on Earth, their time might be coming to an end mostly because human beings here and abroad want them as pets. Ouch.

It seems past time for us to embrace the Honorable Harvest code followed by native peoples as described in Robin Wall Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass*. Before harvesting anything, including air, water, and literal body of the earth: rocks and soil and fossil fuels, Natives peoples: *ask permission and abide by the answer; never take the first nor the last; take only what is needed and only that which is given; never take more than half, leaving some for others; harvest in a way that minimizes harm; use what is harvested respectfully, and never waste what is been taken; give a gift in reciprocity for what has been taken; and commit to sustaining what is taken so the gift will last forever*. My conclusion is that the pet trade represents a Dishonorable Harvest.

Why was our Coal Mining Issues Team sponsoring a session on ornate box turtles? The Deer Run Mine in Hillsboro, IL, has been granted an expansion permit allowing it to encroach on the habitat of the ornate box turtle. Kimmerer has this to say about coal mining: *taking coal buried deep in the earth, for which we must inflict irreparable damage, violates every precept of the code. By no stretch of the imagination is coal "given" to us. We have to wound the land and water to gouge it from Mother Earth*. Coal mining is one among many examples of Dishonorable Harvesting in our industrial age.

Edmonds concluded his presentation by responding to the question everyone had in mind: What can we do to help? He suggested that we teach people to avoid acquiring them for pets, thereby reducing demand. We can make our backyards and other lands turtle-friendly by providing native plants and a water source. If we have to mow, we can do it carefully, on the lookout for turtles at home. (Click [here](#) for more ideas.)

In addition to these practical suggestions, I wish we could cast off our deeply embedded human-centered perspective and take on an Earth-centered one, as Native people have modeled for us.

Embracing their Honorable Harvest code would benefit our suffering planet in no small measure.

All of this information evoked in me the desire to integrate tenets of the Honorable Harvest in my daily life as well. Now to ponder what that would mean!

Photo: Thanks to Devin Edmonds

## November 1 and 2 All Saints and All Souls

Enjoy reading/listening to NPR commentator and physicist Aaron Freeman's talk "[You Want a Physicist to Speak at Your Funeral](#)". Very cleverly, Freeman tells us what a physicist might say to grieving family members about the conservation of energy as it relates to loss. When I read it, saints and souls came to mind, giving me a deeper appreciation of the communion of saints.

## November 9 The Coal Trap: Hidden Consequences of Stagnant Policy 6:30 – 8:00 PM Virtual Event

James Van Nostrand, author of *The Coal Trap: How West Virginia Was Left Behind in the Clean Energy Revolution*, will tell the story of how a fair energy transition can be derailed by political failure, proving that policy matters!

A panel discussion will follow to explore the similarities between West Virginia and Illinois energy policies. The discussion will provide an overview of the Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, explore concerns regarding Carbon Capture and Storage and how utility companies can do more to better serve rate payers. Sponsored by the Coal Mining Issues Team of the Sierra Club. Register using this [link](#).

## November 15 America Recycles Day

The twenty-fifth annual [America Recycles Day](#) is an effort to raise awareness of the importance and impact of recycling and to encourage communities and businesses to be more conscious about their waste management. While I tend to be skeptical about how much *plastic* is actually recycled, there is no doubt in my mind about the value of recycling electronics, especially after OMI Novices and I took a field trip to a local e-cycling center last spring.

[CJD E-Cycling](#) in Edwardsville, Illinois, recycles anything with a cord, as well as batteries which can never go to the curbside recycling bin. We were shocked by the amount of electronics in this one small business in one small town, leading us to imagine how much is around the world! Everything electronic is recycled there, all parts and components. Some computers are refurbished for resale. This business has one small dumpster which is emptied every other week, showing us that they truly practice what they preach.

The novices left the Center committed to doing their part when they returned to their home countries in August. What I left with was the commitment to be very conservative about my use of electronic devices because all the recycling in the world is not going to keep Earth healthy. How will you honor America Recycles Day?

Photo L to R: Novices EtienneKabemba, Pablo Henning, Siphon Mukobola, Royd Miyomba, Chileshe Mulenga



## November 24 Thanksgiving

For your reflection time on this holiday, I





invite you to spend time with the [Haudesonee Thanksgiving Address](#), a pledge of reciprocity with the living world. Kimmerer, in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, gives us motivation for this practice: The *Thanksgiving Address* describes our mutual allegiance as human delegates to the democracy of species. *If what we want for people is patriotism, then let us inspire true love of country by invoking the land herself. If we want to raise good leaders, let us remind our children of the eagle and the maple. If we want to grow good citizens, then let us teach reciprocity. If what we aspire to is justice for all, let it be*

*justice for all of Creation. Have a blessed Thanksgiving!*

## November 26 Black Friday, the Holiday Season, and Recycling

Americans throw away 25% more trash between Thanksgiving and the New Year holiday than any other time of year. The extra waste amounts to 25 million tons of garbage, or about 1 million extra tons per week, according to [Stanford University's](#) web site. I always find facts like these disturbing, and I tend to think that I am not part of the problem; however, learning alternatives to our wasteful traditions continues to open my eyes. I encourage you to visit the site which offers many ways to reduce waste this holiday season. Maybe your whole family can join in choosing alternatives!

## Autumn Reading: *Dropping the Struggle* by Roger Housden

If you resonate with Thomas Berry's insight that *human spirituality emerges in relation to the Earth community*, you might find this book suggestion a good one as trees are dropping the struggle to grow, and leaves are dropping the struggle to hang on and photosynthesize.

In his book *Dropping the Struggle*, Roger Housden describes how each of us might drop several struggles: To Be Special, For a Perfect Life, For Meaning and Purpose, For Love, With Time, With Change, and To Know. The author reflects that when we drop these struggles and live in the present moment, *the tenderness of the world, the sheer beauty of it, can rise up to meet us. We can belong again. We can feel the motion of that tenderness and trust the intimacy of being held always in an embrace that in reality never left us and never will. Then we can trust that not only life, but also death is perfectly safe.*

With leaves and trees may you enjoy dropping the struggle and resting in the *ungraspable ground from which all experience emerges*. Thanks to Roger Housden for a thought-provoking book



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