



La Vista Ecological Learning Center

A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate
December, 2022

E-News and Eco-spirituality Calendar

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

December and Dark-Sky Nights



On the grounds of the Oblate Novitiate few outdoor lights appear when darkness descends; in fact, when we leave the Learning Center office after a study session in the winter and step outside, we can barely see our hands in front of our faces! This causes some trepidation since we are so unused to real darkness; however, out come the iPhone flashlights, and everyone

makes their way safely up the stairs to their cars.

The dusk to dawn lights were removed during the recent renovation out of concern for the more than 300 migratory bird species using the Mississippi River as a flyway. We didn't want to disorient them, veering them off course on their bi-annual journeys from their breeding grounds in the northern US to their wintering grounds along the Gulf of Mexico and Central and South America.

Awareness of the need for darkness has grown since those lights (and the thousands upon thousands of streetlights in cities and towns everywhere) were installed many years ago. In the beautifully written book *The End of Night* by Paul Bogard, readers learn many other equally compelling reasons to reclaim dark-sky nights; among them is our awareness that sea turtles, amphibians, salamanders, fish, bats, moths, and fireflies are also negatively impacted by artificial night lighting. These beings evolved in bright days and dark nights. Bogard writes, *While most of us are inside and asleep, outside the night world is wide awake with mating, migrations, pollinations, and feeding – in short, the basic happenings that keep world biodiversity alive.*

Human beings also evolved with dark nights and bright days, so being awash with artificial light at night proves to be detrimental to our health, too. Bogard interviewed David Saetre, a professor of religion, to get his take on the absence of dark nights and its impact on our spiritual

lives. Saetre points out that it is not as simple as *light-good; dark-bad* as is often assumed in religious settings. He points to scripture stories where night and darkness are occasions for experiencing the presence of God; for example, Jacob who wrestled all night with a stranger and Samuel who heard a voice calling in the night. Saetre points out, *We need both light and dark, and because daylight is the place of obligation, to experience the true self requires the night.*

What will happen to humankind as we become less familiar with and more fearful of nighttime? What will we be like when there are no places left on Earth where we can actually see the Milky Way and imagine our place in the sacred universe? Our desacralization of the world comes back to bite us over and over; so we light up the night to our detriment and that of so many others in Earth's community. There is much we cannot personally do about the multiple crises on Earth but eliminating light pollution and restoring dark-sky nights is one that may be within reach. For some suggestions, visit the [International Dark-Sky Association's web site](#). It is a treasure.

Advent, Christmas, and Winter offer opportunities to deepen our appreciation of night as sacred and holy if we choose to enter them consciously. Every nighttime can tune us in to our deeper selves through our dreams, restore our health with rest, and offer us a place to embrace the great Silence out of which we came and to which we will return in the end.

December 13 Workday in the Oblates Preserve

9:30 – Noon

We are currently working on a slope with the river in view – a great place to spend a winter day removing honeysuckle.

Won't you join us? RSVP: info@lavistaelc.org



December 17 Celebrating Winter Solstice and the Longest Night

7:00 – 9:00 PM

On this longest night of the year, we'll deepen our appreciation of darkness as sacred and of value. As usual, we will take time to hear what each participant plans to do as we seek to heal our rare and precious planet in 2023. Weather permitting, there will be an optional night hike, so dress for that if you want to participate.

Please bring a snack to share. We will meet in the Novitiate classroom (former recreation room) which now has an outside doorway.

***Thanks for letting us know if you plan participating:

info@lavistaelc.org

December 31st Take a Wild Night Hike

In his book *The End of Night*, Paul Bogard dispels the notion that darkness breeds criminal activity. He says that the real criminal activity is the phenomenal proliferation of light at night causing cancer in humans, disorientation for migratory birds, obscuring of stars, and the disruption of sleep, among other ills.



Find a dark place that light has not tamed and take a wild night hike as a countercultural New Year's Eve activity. May your New Year be blessed with a new appreciation for the sacred daily cycle of daylight and darkness.

Photo by UnKknown Traveller on Unsplash

Box Turtle Follow Up...

Shortly after posting November's E-news, one reader shared this article about a study of box turtles that I found an interesting follow up to November's reflection. You may also enjoy it:

<https://www.npr.org/2022/11/02/1119912475/why-this-study-of-box-turtles-will-plod-along-slow-and-steady-for-100-years>



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