



## La Vista Ecological Learning Center

A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

December, 2021

### E-News and Eco-spirituality Calendar

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

*Note: I posted this reflection a few years ago, and it remains my favorite. It might be helpful to resurface it now when life seems like anything but a party. May it serve as a reminder to broaden our vision beyond current dismal realities as the cosmos continues calling us to deep time and deep spirituality in our local place.*

### December Still Celebrates

One year I chose to make my annual retreat during December, and someone commented that this was a poor choice as I would be missing holiday parties; however, what I found was that I missed nothing. All I had to do was look out a window or take a walk to celebrate December's seasonal festivities!



I observed downy, pileated, and red-bellied woodpeckers wildly flinging suet from the bird feeder, and I heard passionate courting calls of great horned and barred owls. Casting my eyes upward at night, I watched Gemini, Orion, and Taurus dance across the sky. I found myself envying cardinals in trees flaunting their best seasonal red against the snow, and I was enchanted by green pines gathering snowflakes before dropping them in festive puffs. This annual party begged for my attention, my

participation.

As I delighted in the sights and sounds, a quote by Thomas Berry came to mind: *the universe, by definition, is a single, gorgeous celebratory event*. With this in mind, my retreat became an immersion in a daily party, and I not only felt the joyous oneness of life, I heard it, saw it, and celebrated it as I expanded my identity to include a deepening cosmological consciousness.

Also during the retreat a lovely poem by William Stafford was offered for my prayer:

*Breathe on the world.*

*Hold out your hands to it.*

*When mornings and evenings roll along*

*watch how they open and close,*

*how they invite you to the long party that your life is.*

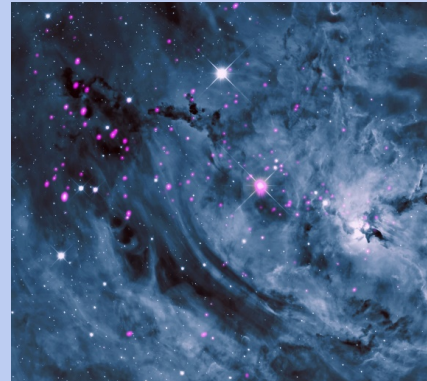
May each of us daily embrace the celebration that is the universe and the party that is our life. Blessings of the holy seasons to you and yours from all of us at La Vista!

### Seasons of Advent and Christmas

On October 31<sup>st</sup> I received an email from a friend who wrote, *I just saw my first Christmas commercial tonight. YUK!* I took this as a reminder that it takes real effort to celebrate the sacred seasons and feasts in a consumer culture. Maybe the previous reflection offers us

a way to do this along with a passage by Fr. Richard Rohr: *The incarnation of God did not happen in Bethlehem two thousand years ago. That is just when some of us started taking it seriously. The incarnation actually happened approximately 14.5 billion years ago with a moment that we now call "The Big Bang.... Two thousand years ago was the **human** incarnation of God in Jesus, but before that there was the first and original incarnation through light, water, land, sun, moon, stars, plants, trees, fruit, birds, serpents, cattle, fish, and "every kind of wild beast" according to our own creation story (Genesis 1:3-25). This was the "Cosmic Christ"...*

During Advent our daily celebrations of incarnation might include feeding a treat to the birds and squirrels; DIY Christmas cards with your own nature photo and the quote by Rohr; sitting around a bonfire listening for night sounds; downloading the free App *SkyView Lite*, taking it outside, and identifying constellations. Doing these activities intentionally, as a replacement for our cultural addiction to consumerism, would be a gift to the Sacred being born every moment of every day, month, and season. In conclusion, enjoy pondering the NASA photo: The Lagoon Nebula Gives Birth to Stars!



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## **December 11 United Nations *International Mountain Day***

Why would the UN declare a special day for mountains? The web site for this event shares some reasons (adapted):

- Mountains are biodiversity hotspots, covering 27% of Earth's surface.
- Of the 20 plant species that supply 80% of the world's food, six originated and have been diversified in mountains: maize, potatoes, barley, sorghum, tomatoes, and apples.
- More than half of humanity relies on mountain freshwater for everyday life.
- 15% of the world population call mountains *home*.
- Mountains are under threat from climate change and overexploitation. As the global climate continues to warm, mountain people — some of the world's poorest — face even greater struggles to survive.
- The rising temperatures also mean that mountain glaciers are melting at unprecedented rates, affecting freshwater supplies downstream for millions of people.

These facts reveal why *integral ecology* is a key concept in successfully caring for our common home. In the encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis reminds us that *a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.* (LS, 49) Let us hear the cry of both mountains and people!

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## **December 7 – Workday in the Oblates Preserve**

**9:30 am – 3 pm**

This long workday on the first Tuesday of the month is a special one. Our Natural Areas Preservation Specialist, Debbie Newman, will lead us in two projects, picking up trash in a recently cleared area and removing honeysuckle close to the bluff. Midday, we will enjoy lunch (provided) in the renovated Lodge. Please join us in this extended effort and call if you plan on participating so we can plan lunch adequately. 618-466-5004

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## **December 18 – Online Celebration of Winter Solstice and Full Moon**

**7:00 - 8:00 pm CST**

Even though the solstice is a sun event, we will add the full moon to our celebration! The actual coincidence of the solstice and full moon is a very rare happening – the next one

will occur in 2094. But they will coincide for us this year! Join us online this shortest day and longest night and renew your commitment to caring for our common home in 2022. Please let me know if you plan to participate, and I will send you the Zoom link. It will be fun to include folks who could not be present in person! [info@lavistaelc.org](mailto:info@lavistaelc.org)

