



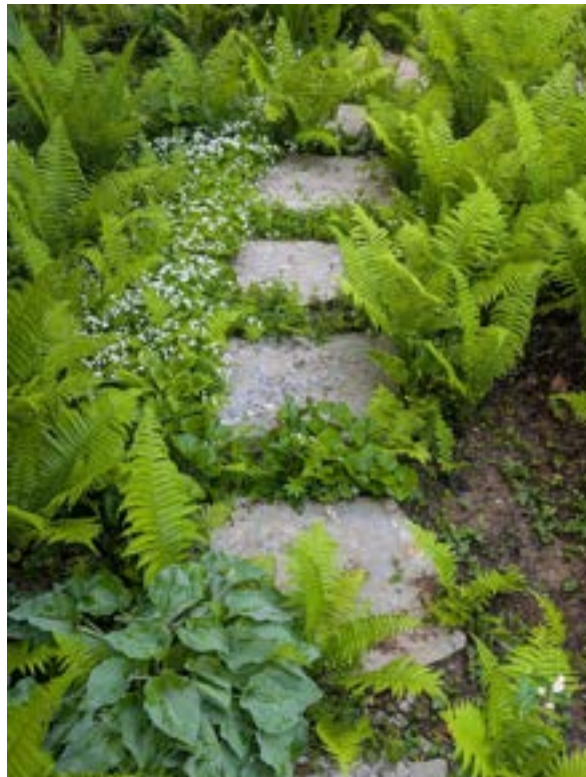
Praise Be to You

An Anthology of
Hope and Healing
for Creation



Praise Be to You: An Anthology of Hope and Healing for Creation

Assembled by the Cincinnati Jesuit Parish Family Healthy Earth Team, from the creative works of members of Bellarmine Chapel and St. Xavier Church.



Cover photos from the Nexus Community Garden and Urban Farm on the campus of Xavier University.

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A Prayer For Our Earth

This prayer by Pope Francis appeared at the end of his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*. Every meeting of the Jesuit Parish Family Healthy Earth Team ends with this prayer.

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness
all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned
and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world
and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty,
not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor
and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth
of each thing,
to be filled with
awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are
profoundly united with every
creature as we journey towards
your infinite light.

We thank you for being
with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray,
in our struggle,
for justice, love and peace.
Amen.



Dear Jesuit Parish Family,

In celebration of *Laudato Si'*, and of the work of our Jesuit Parish Family to put the encyclical into action, I invite you to receive *Praise Be To You: An Anthology of Hope and Healing for Creation* as both gift and challenge.

Rooted in our Jesuit Parish Family Vision—Being transformed in the Body of Christ, to bear hope and healing, in the Ignatian tradition—this anthology gathers together the beauty and diversity of our community's voices. Within its pages you will find poems, prayers, essays, photographs, and art: offerings of gratitude, lament, and longing for God's creation. Together they remind us that caring for the earth is not an abstract task but a deeply personal act of faith.

I am grateful for this resource, for every contributor, and for the tireless work of our Jesuit Parish Family Healthy Earth Team who coordinated it. May it guide our prayer, inspire our imagination, and strengthen our commitment to walk together in hope.

Let us continue to connect our faith to the care of creation, as Pope Francis has called us to do, seeing it not as an optional concern but as an outflow of our discipleship and love.

Much peace and all good,

Fr. Paul Lickteig, SJ
Pastor, Jesuit Parish Family
Spring 2026



INTRODUCTION

Your imperishable spirit is in all things.

~ Wisdom 12:1

Within these pages are creative outpourings of love for the natural world. They are a gift for you, meant as yet another way we seek to awaken in ourselves and our fellow parishioners an overwhelming desire to protect and nurture “our common home.”

Our foundation is in Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’* and so we assembled this anthology to honor the tenth anniversary of its publication. Some of us experience anxiety and grief as we face the so-called sixth mass extinction of species and the existential crisis of climate change. We seek signs of hope.

This anthology - called Praise Be To You (the translation of *Laudato Si’*) – is one of those signs. Who cannot smile and feel hopeful when you see the creative expressions of love in these pages? Love for the honeybee, the sunflower, the bloodroot, the bottlenose dolphin, the ashes of a beloved pet. Awed by waterfalls, glaciers, mountains, hailstones flashing like diamonds, bison near a mountain stream, a hillside of wildflowers, and simple blades of grass teeming with life.

Thank you to all our contributors who shared your hearts with us. To you, our readers, may you break free from ideas and abstractions about nature and embrace the actual, miraculous world – all of it – which the living God created and continually brings into being.

Hope in Creation

Emily Pollina

O God, who pledged to be with us always,
I search for you and find you as you promise:

I hear your voice in the song of the hermit thrush
In the woods at the edge of the field.

I see your smile in the sunlight,
Filtered green and gentle through the maple leaves above my head.

I feel your gentle hand on my shoulder
When the ash twig bends with the wind to reach for me.

You laugh in the dance of last year's leaves
As the wind twirls them over the stones.

You play in the frolics of the skunk kits
Who gambol through the field at dawn.

You dance in the swirl of the maple seeds
Who ride the gentle breeze to earth.

You sing in the wings of the hummingbird
Hovering to drink from the trumpet of a flower.

Change comes swiftly to your world, O God.
And when I grieve for all that has been lost,
My feet remember the contours
Of your familiar hills as I climb them and
In those hills I feel your steadfast strength.

And when your rain falls down,
Brushing gently the trunk of the maple,
Running softly over my hand,
To sink into the thirsty roots of my garden,
I touch your ever-renewing love.

And in my heart a frond of hope uncurls,
Expanding by the water of your love—
Present with me always in the beauty of your world.

Amen

OUR HOME, OUR HOPE

Mixed Media Collage by Samantha Ross-Asmah



"Our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."

- Pope Francis, Laudato Si

Guide to Our Home, Our Hope

Spirituality, ecology and our origins - these themes intertwine. Our world is a gift to us that has been neglected. Inspiration for this piece came from Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, which was addressed to the world. It acknowledges that no matter your religious beliefs, we must all work together to heal "Our Sister, Mother Earth" (St. Francis of Assisi). The Earth is struggling to survive. Pollution has dwindled the natural resources on which we have based civilization.

My piece begins with flora and natural materials of the Earth on the left side, representing nature's abundance. As your gaze moves down, "abundance" fades into dead leaves and litter, representing the death of natural abundance through lack of gratitude and neglect.

...we must all work together to heal "our Sister, Mother Earth"

The beads in the land and water signify how pollution on land is affecting our water sources and wildlife. The tablets represent the impact of pharmaceutical companies on pollution. The black oil signifies the impact of oil spills on aquatic life. The oil also serves as a transition into the impact of technology on our world.

The black and green jewels signify greed and selfishness motivating companies and individuals who profit from disrespecting nature, including human life. The apple represents how our food is also affected through genetically-modified products, pesticides, artificial flavorings and so on.

The butterfly acknowledges that technology, with effort, can be used for good.

The flags represent that the world must work together to reach a place of enlightenment, symbolized by the white rose, so that we can start anew, creating a new chapter in which Mother Earth is respected.

At the center of the piece, the mirror asks viewers to reflect on how they may have contributed to environmental destruction and whether they are willing to work towards positive environmental change.

The green land signifies that there is still hope and Mother Earth is still supporting us.

Finally, the circle shape of the piece represents the cycles of life. We can work for a new beginning, but we must shape a clear path so as not to fall prey to the patterns of the past and lose the opportunity to correct our mistakes.



Ode to a Lady

Jim Brown

There you are, worker bee lady, with your pollen laden saddlebags. Channeling the love, dedication and courage of your fore-mothers, you do what scientists tell us you have been doing for 100 million years. We have found one of you preserved in amber with traces of pollen still clinging.

Guided by the sun, and the navigational directions choreographed in the waggle dance of the scout bees, you head out to fulfill your divine purpose: bringing back to the hive a belly full of nectar, and thighs golden with pollen — so beautifully caught in my late friend Steve’s photo.

I have had the joy of seeing you come bouncing in on the front porch of the beehive, like a jet trying to land on an aircraft carrier. You’ve been foraging for nectar from nature’s neighborhood gifts: snowdrops, crocus, cherry and maple trees, dandelions, forsythia, and even lawn clover.

It’s a wonder to watch you searching for colorful petals to climb upon. There you suck out the nectar, a sugary liquid those flowers produce to attract pollinators.

In one of the great collaborations in nature, you engage in a miraculous process; you pollinate, along with butterflies, bumble bees, and other insects, a rich array of flowers to behold, and fruits and vegetables to enjoy at our kitchen tables.

Over the years I have sneaked peeks at you, oh master alchemist, as you move from one hexagonal cell to another to deposit a salivary mixture. There is a secret recipe you follow, of enzymatic changes and water evaporation, changing nectar into honey and adding pollen as food for the colony.

Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si’* that there is “a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.” I wish he had included you, the honeybee, on his list. On behalf of billions throughout the ages who have revered the taste of honey, I thank you for your gift of the ultimate taste, sweetness.

In memory of my dear friend Steve Woodruff, nature lover, outdoorsman, photographer, and great doctor who introduced me to the joys and sorrows of beekeeping. He passed away this past year — too soon.



Photo by Steve Woodruff



Steve Woodruff, left, and Jim Brown

Reclaiming Christmas: A Carbon-national or Incarnational Event?

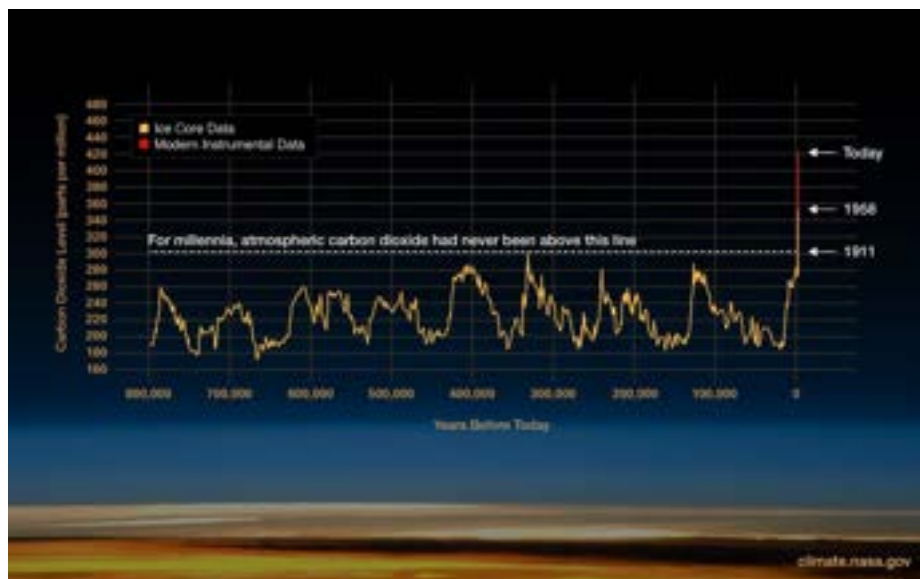
M.E. Dillon

The tariffs are coming! Toy prices might soar!
How should a budget-conscious parent cope, come Christmas?

Perhaps Pause. Perhaps rethink.

The U.S. has three percent of the world's children yet purchases 40 percent of the world's toys. How many Barbies, blasters, and gizmos does one family need? How many presents are in our children's best interest?

We buy most toys from China, the country first in carbon emissions. Carbon dioxide, primarily produced by burning fossil fuels, is the greenhouse gas warming our planet at an alarming rate. How much carbon dioxide soars into our atmosphere when toys and other products are manufactured and transported a world away? Tons. Billions of tons. Our atmospheric CO2 levels have recently risen to levels unseen in human history.



This blanket of CO2 has been trapping the sun's energy resulting in a dangerous game of climatic dominoes. More energy trapped means extreme heat, drier wood for wildfires, and stronger winds. 2025 has seen record wildfires in California along with tornadoes and flooding that ravaged Kentucky. Buying so many toys and things from the world's largest CO2 emitter isn't in our children's best interest.

Pause. Rethink. Reset.

But much of China's carbon emissions are due to the manufacturer of "stuff" for the US, which is the second largest producer of CO2, as well as the largest emitter per person. Perhaps we need to remove the environmental log from our own eyes before we remove the splinter from our neighbor's.

Pause. Rethink. Reset. Reflect.

What have we been celebrating? Much of cultural Christmas is consumeristic, chaotic, and centered on self. Incarnational Christmas is calmer, faith-filled, and creation-based. But celebrating Christmas doesn't need to be one or the other. We can adjust.

So perhaps this Christmas we can:

- Reduce purchases and increase family experiences
- Reduce decorating with trinkets and increase decorating with nature
- Reduce screen time and increase story time
- Reduce streaming services and increase memberships to nature centers
- Reduce buying items that hurt our biosphere and increase donations for those in need.

When our children were school-aged, we put pictures of goats in their stockings with a note explaining we had donated to an organization that bought goats for families in developing countries. Unsure how to react, one declared "Well! This is interesting!" But they were touched enough to tell their friends.

This was our family's small action towards building hope. Collective wisdom resides in our church family. Shall we begin a Parish Family blog? Share our stories of celebrating creation and the incarnation? Collectively, we can help "...heaven and nature sing!" In supporting each other, this Jesuit Parish Family can honor the first Jesuit Pope, Francis, who in his Christmas 2024 message proclaimed....

["This Christmas, at the beginning of the Jubilee Year, I invite every individual, and all peoples and nations, to find the courage needed ... to become pilgrims of hope..."](#)

The Importance of What Remains

Paul Fuchs

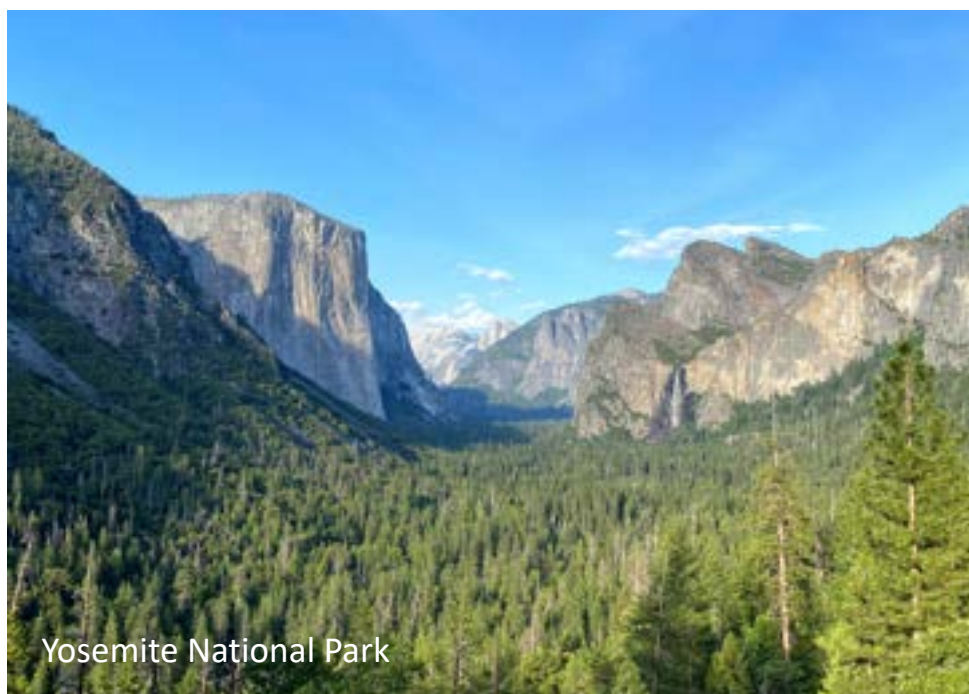
Our natural world has been altered beyond recognition, driven by humanity's desire for development, and wealth. But there are still protected places where natural processes are allowed to work as God intended.

Whether we realize it or not, the nature that bring us joy affect our daily lives in momentous ways.

A thriving, forest ecosystem, for example, filters our air and water, removing pollutants. Trees suck carbon dioxide out of the air, mitigating the effects of climate change. The more healthy forests we promote and protect, the more of a natural guard we're providing to combat climate change.

Tree roots prevent erosion and lead to healthy soil, without which we cannot grow food.

When I'm in a forest, I remind myself of these things. In Yosemite National Park, I have to look away from the towering waterfalls and rock towers to appreciate the lush expanse of forest. Or when I'm climbing at Red River Gorge, I'll look at the trees around me and remember the oxygen they give me to breathe. Or camping at Indiana Dunes... though the park is surrounded by roads and factories, the bio-diverse habitat that remains shelters thousands of plants that provide food and habitat for migratory birds.



Yosemite National Park

Those birds affect distant ecosystems by consuming harmful pests, pollinating plants, dispersing seeds, and even affecting people who find joy in birds' existence. Who else - but God Himself - could create such a complex, cyclic system where small occurrences can have huge effects hundreds of miles away?

Though we live in Ohio, our lives are affected by the well being of distant oceans. The temperature patterns of the ocean affect weather patterns, ultimately driving the forces that create storms, snow, and sunny days in Cincinnati. A healthy ocean can regulate the climate by absorbing carbon dioxide, and provides oxygen through microscopic organisms such as phytoplankton.

A clean ocean means healthy wildlife and clean seafood. Healthy marine ecosystems support mangroves and coral reefs, which provide habitats for many species while also protecting coastlines from natural disasters. Who else - but God Himself - could create such an intricate system of checks and balances?

God created our natural world to benefit our lives in ways I often don't fully appreciate. This is why I feel motivated to protect the natural spaces that remain. A healthy Earth is not only crucial to millions of plant and animal species, but also to our own well-being and that of generations to come.



Red River Gorge

Encountering God in Nature in Three Parts

Mike Harmon

I. In the Lake

I am fascinated by the discovery that our physical world is reducible to seemingly random dancing particles naked to our unaided eyes. God's ultimate jest? Some years ago, I was graced with a glimpse of what this might mean.

I was alone in a northern Michigan lake. Clear water, sandy bottom. Puffs of dark-bottomed cloud. Across the lake, varying depths and sun rays combined to cast a pattern of blues: aqua, azure, turquoise, teal, baby, robin's egg, Caribbean, cornflower, cerulean. I paddled to a depth where I stood on the bottom, the water plane at eye level. I scrunched my toes, wiggling them in the sand. I tried to imagine how many grains of sand were beneath my feet. Could I become aware of each one individually? Did I not share the essence of existence with a single grain?

No need to die and rise to an imagined heaven.



My attention went to the surface of the lake. It appeared in equipoise, as if a glass table top. Undulating with the wind and current. I had the goofy sensation of standing in an enormous bowl of jelly. Suddenly, raindrops. I looked to the horizon and saw sun but overhead was one of those dark-bottomed puffs. A soft rain, pleasantly landing on my face. Caresses, kisses penetrating to my deepest being.

My view returned to the eye-level glass table top. Individual raindrops were visible as they bounced off the surface. Sun shot through each falling and bouncing raindrop. They became like diamonds. A shower of dancing diamonds. A beatific vision. No need to die and rise to an imagined heaven. For those blessed with eyes to see, we are already there.

II. In the Grass

When our son Patrick was young, he wondered why I mowed our lawn. He thought if grass got high and wild, deer and foxes could come live with us. Some years later, I had a simple experience that raised my consciousness. I was mowing our lawn, a good portion of which is on a slope. The going was tough. The tall grass extended an invitation to rest where I was. I laid down, stretched out, and relaxed. Took some sweet, deep breaths.

I started to take note of my surroundings. Life teemed around me. Variety. Individuality. Codependency. Beauty. And I was smack dab in the midst of it all, part of it all. I was an integral part of nature. Blades of grass -- no two alike, each its own texture, shade of green, shape, and size. Other forms of photo-synthesized plant life, some we might call weeds, mingled in. All this was bathed in the sunlight. I saw luminescence, rays of light, shadows. Light, energy, life.

The insect life within this world was spectacular. Ants running along blades of grass. Grasshoppers. Caterpillars. Beetles. Crickets. Worms. Bugs I can't name. All, I knew, with a purpose. Above, butterflies fluttered. Monarchs, swallowtails. Oak, maple, and sycamore leaves swayed. Patrolling all this were robins, chickadees, goldfinch, cardinals, blue jays, sparrows, wrens.

I was there long enough to see a rabbit; for squirrels to scamper; for a caterpillar to trundle up my arm. The experience was grace, revealing a vast, complex organism which includes me, us.

Occasionally, I lie on the lawn to repeat my revelatory experience.



Now my lawn approach is different. No chemicals. Where passersby might see weeds, I revel at the quilt of violets, chickweed, clover, creeping charlie, nettle, wild strawberries. Occasionally, I lie on the lawn to repeat my revelatory experience. Last year, a neighbor rushed over to make sure I was alright, no stroke or heart attack. Thank you for checking, I said. Sorry to alarm you. I'm fine, just contemplating.

This is God present. I Am Who Am. Not in a church structure, but in the divine cathedral of nature. The family of deer who reside in the ravine behind our garage visit daily. They have worn a path across our yard. No foxes yet, though a pair have been spotted nearby. Our son would be proud.

III. On the Mountain

Hiking up mountains in Colorado was one of my youthful passions. Peak experiences, if you'll pardon the pun. One of these occurred on the Barr Trail. I was alone, at 13,000 feet, in a boulder-strewn area above the tree line. In places, snow obscured the trail. As happens in the Rockies, a thunderstorm popped up. I needed to find a safe harbor.

Some yards off trail, up the escarpment, a jumble of boulders formed a rock house with a narrow entry. I skittered across the slope, slithered in, and turned around to observe a brief, terrifying sound and light show. The sky darkened. Lightning cracked all around, followed by rolls of thunder. Then, an eerie pause. No droplets of water.

Suddenly, hail the size of golf balls showered down around my rock house. They landed on nearby pink granite, each a prism backlit by sunlight. They came down in the raiment of twinkling Christmas bulbs. Upon touchdown, they transformed into bouncing diamonds. After a moment, this ceased, leaving behind a rock surface littered with crystal balls. It was quiet again. Serene. The sky cleared. A hail bow appeared, arcing its spectrum of primary colors. God's promise.

Then stillness, a light breeze, a whisper in my heart. God spoke.



Night Sky and Temple Veil

Lindsay Horn



Learning that the curtain covering the Holy of Holies in ancient Judaism was often depicted as the night sky inspired "Temple Veil." Recently, I also learned that some believe Mary was sewing the temple veil when the angel Gabriel appeared to her. My image of the temple veil shows the curtain billowing open, beckoning the Holiness beyond. Or, it can be symbolic of the veil being torn in two during Jesus' Passion.



Mountain View

Dennis Kirley

"In the mountains, there you feel free."

From The Waste Land by T.S. Elliot



From atop Mt. Stanserhorn, Lucerne, Switzerland



This statue of Saint Francis at my aunt's house stands in blessing over the ashes of beloved pets buried there.

Mary Sarah Kirley

St. Francis and the pets

The Privilege of (Missionary) Discipleship (Mt 13:16)

Mac Johnson

Ideas are seeds

Some grow to reality

Others are not sown.



Rose After Rainfall

When your eyes are wide-open, you can find beauty in unexpected places and times.

Mary Koenig-Clapp

Why plant native trees and shrubs?

Tim Kloppenborg

By planting native trees and shrubs we promote three Jesuit Apostolic Preferences: Care for Our Common Home, Walking with the Excluded, and Helping Youth actively participate.

Care for our common home

Preserving life on our planet is our responsibility. As we learn more about our common home, we will love it more. Being outdoors gives a deep sense of peace, rootedness, contentment and love.

Tree planting is an act of faith because growing trees clean and cool the air and water, reduce flooding, slow erosion, provide wildlife habitat, provide oxygen and reduce carbon dioxide. Trees lift our spirits, beautify our neighborhoods, and help people heal. Tree and shrub planting is a step to ecological conversion, helping open our eyes to the wonders around us. Planting a tree is a gift to future generations; you plant hope, peace, and love.

Walking with the excluded

Marginalized people bear the brunt of climate change. Planting trees helps people who live in so-called heat islands within cities. Environmental concern is one aspect of loving our neighbor as ourselves, as much as caring about the water they drink, the food they eat, the shelter that protects them, and the physical ailments from which they suffer.

Helping youth actively participate

Concern for the environment is a deeply held value among emerging generations, who are also the most alienated from the institutional church. Engagement in environmental concerns is a way to encourage them to listen to the gospel. Children may show a mature tree to their own kids one day and say, "I planted this when it was tiny."

At Benedictine College I learned nuances on our Jesuit Apostolic Preferences. We have responsibility to love the world as God loves it. God is in everything and all things are connected. Knowing our place leads to belonging. Take only what we need and share the rest. The focus on planting native trees and shrubs is to support native wildlife. Plants and animals co-evolve over centuries. In the circle of life, we need to plant trees that bugs will eat and, in turn, provide food for birds and other animals. We can create connected communities for wildlife by planting individual plants or small woodlots in our own yard and by connecting with our neighbors' yards. Help us care for our own yards, share with our neighbors, and involve our youth in planting native.

The Power and Majesty of Yellowstone National Park

Mark Komanecky

In 2017, we went on a family vacation to Wyoming and Montana to spend time hiking, running, walking, and kayaking in Grand Teton National Park and Yellowstone National Park. One of our favorite times was early in the morning in Yellowstone watching - and photographing - the sunrise before we headed to the Grand Canyon of Yellowstone.

Along the way, we encountered a lone bison who had strayed from the herd. Majestic and powerful, he captured our attention as he ate slowly and walked quietly. The power of God - and the beauty of the natural world - were clearly on display that cool May morning.



Nature Paintings

Alessia Aurisano, age 12



Mushrooms

Elizabeth LaVelle



I made this sculpture for my dad's birthday. He's always had a fondness for mushrooms and loves pointing them out to me during the hikes we take as a family. One memory that really stands out happened in the spring of 2020. On a cold, rainy April day, my dad took me morel hunting for the first time. We spent nearly two hours searching with no luck. Then, just as we were about to give up, I happened to look down while walking behind him—and there it was: a single morel. It wasn't very big, and it was the only one we found that day, but we brought it home, cooked it, and shared it together as a family. That small moment has stuck with me, and this sculpture is a symbol of that memory and my dad's love of the outdoors.



Bottlenose Dolphin

Iris LaVelle

Bottlenose dolphins are frequently spotted in the Atlantic Ocean, especially off the coast of Florida, where I recently traveled with my eighth-grade class for a marine biology field trip. We explored mangrove ecosystems, snorkeled with a variety of fish, and were even lucky enough to see a few graceful eagle rays. One memorable moment came while returning from a snorkeling site—several bottlenose dolphins began swimming alongside our boat, giving us an incredible up-close view.

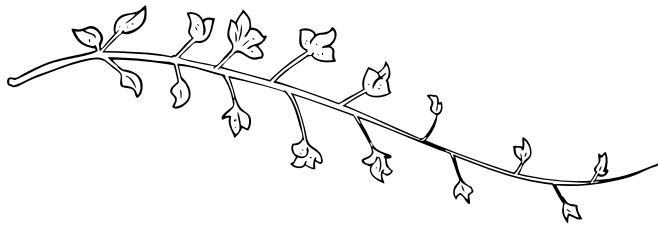
Bottlenose dolphins are known for their playful and curious nature. They are easily recognized by their sleek bodies, light gray upper sides, and white undersides. Ranging from 6 to 13 feet in length, they are considered medium-sized dolphins. Their short, rounded snouts—resembling the shape of a bottle—give them their distinctive name.

Find and Match

Native Plants

Iris LaVelle

I created this Bingo card for the Embracing God's Creation Wildflower Walk in Buttercup Valley in April 2025.



BINGO

 Wood Poppy	 Blue Bells	 Wild Ginger	 Slender Leaf Toothwort
 Blue Phlox	 Purple Violet	 Dutchman's Breeches	 Bed Straw
 May Apple	 Trout Lily	 Solomon's Seal	 White Violet
 Water Leaf	 Acorn	 Buckeye Tree Leaf	 Beech Tree

Iceberg in the Southern Sea

Anne Schoelwer

On January 1, 2025, as my family sailed through the Scotia Sea on our journey to Antarctica, we encountered this iceberg. It was one of many we saw along the way. Their haunting presence was a stark reminder of climate change's impact on Antarctica and the vital role its waters play in sustaining the health of our sacred Earth.



Bloodroot

Steve LaVelle



Sanguinaria canadensis, commonly known as Bloodroot, is one of the first wildflowers to bloom in our region each spring—and one of my favorites. Its delicate, two-inch flowers feature eight brilliantly white petals surrounding vibrant yellow stamens. Each bloom is accompanied by a single, deeply lobed, blue-green leaf, creating a striking contrast on the early spring forest floor. Bloodroot has a fascinating ecological relationship with ants, which disperse its seeds by carrying away the fleshy structures, or elaiosomes, that surround them. The plant's name comes from the red sap found in its rhizomes, which resembles blood.

Laudato Si' expressed in Art

Holly Schapker and Bill Madges



In this short video, Bill Madges and Holly Schapker show how key themes of Pope Francis' encyclical are expressed in a multi-dimensional art installation by Holly Schapker.



Benny the Bluebird

Mick Owens

I was born next to a fairway at Miami Whitewater Golf Course. More precisely, I was hatched from a blue egg inside of a small wooden box. My house is a marker that a guy called “Greenskeeper” installed, letting golfers know that they have 150 yards to the green.

My name is Benny. Benny the Bluebird. Breaking out of my egg was a messy effort, but Mom soon cleaned our house. Dad must have been out looking for lost golf balls at the time. I was naked, embarrassing, and I couldn’t see, but I heard another baby chick that I soon learned was my sister, Betty Bluebird. I felt three other eggs next to us which would soon be our siblings. Betty was making an awful squeaking sound, a preview of her annoying behavior to come.

I overheard someone say it was May 3rd, a day for golf. Another golfer replied that even a bad day at golf was better than a good day at work. I wasn’t sure what that meant, but it made me curious about this place where I was born and about this thing called golf.

Soon the other eggs cracked open, and Oh, my! did our nest get crazy and crowded. My dad flew back home with tasty morsels he called insects and a mealworm, my favorite treat. After the brightness outside turned dark, then bright again about 20 times, our nest became very crowded.

Mom said it was time to learn to fly and for she and Dad to become “empty nesters.” Mom insisted flying would be fun. After some crash landings my wings started to work. Wow! What an awesome view! There were trees surrounded by acres of luscious grass. A lake matched the color of my lovely blue feathers, and there were patches of sand that annoyed the golfers.

In time I flew longer distances, exploring this new world. Once I got lost, kind of scary. People like the color of our feathers, which I was quite proud of myself—a custom-made royal blue on my head, neck and wings, with bright orange and white on my underside. Really quite classy! I got the impression that humanoids liked us not only for our brilliant colors but also for our graceful, swooping flight patterns. I even heard someone say that we bluebirds brought happiness and good luck. I wondered if that’s why Mr. Greenskeeper put our houses on the golf course so that golfers might hit a hole in one.

I assumed that this park belonged to us bluebirds and our other feathered friends, but there were numerous other creatures here, too. I saw geese, who made a mess on the fairways, and I loved watching deer run and leap. There were rabbits, racoons, turtles, even some red foxes, which Mom warned me to avoid. It was a gorgeous, diverse place to live. I guess we would just have to share our land with humans. I wonder if they would let me play golf with them some day.



Joanie Owens

This Moment

Painting by Joanie Owens, poem by Mick Owens



Outside my window, the frozen winterscape,
two grey squirrels twist and turn, chasing each other
on the bare arms of the sturdy walnut tree playground.
A crisp morning sun shines its light on a crimson cardinal,
perched high above, laughing at the squirrels' antics below.

This moment. This gift. This now.

A stocking hat warms my ears, as I walk this familiar wooded path,
hand in hand with my life's partner.

Our frozen breaths join and float easily between us.

We stroll wordlessly, expressing our tender love for each other.

This moment. This union. This now.

The solstice sun glides slowly toward sunset,
streaking radiant light between layers of frozen pink clouds,
telling all who look that winter has arrived,
whispering to growing things that it's time to rest, to be quiet, to be still.

This moment. This now. This time to wait.

The gibbous orange moon waxes gently, reaches into the darkness
as the evening sky drapes her black cloak above our heads.

The twinkle of stars scatters across the darkened sky
as if thrown randomly onto the earth's canopy.

This moment. This now. This night.

Is this life we have made of years or months or shimmering moments?

Or is it filled with the times we are present,
when we notice life speaking before us,
being awake, alert to see the face of a loved one?

This moment. This now. This life.

Spring Flowers

Lucy Pavlick



This creation was inspired by a walk on a friend's farm in Indianapolis. After the walk, a group of women sat together and crafted, using a variety of materials.

I chose felted wool.



Nature as Artisan

Peg Niehaus

I share these photos because they each carry their own artistry and reflection of the divine, inviting an appreciation for the beauty of this planet and gratitude for witnessing it. They remind us that creation is a continuous dance of renewal and transformation, an ever-unfolding wonder.



Sunflowers, Hungarian countryside

Sunflowers often symbolize the act of turning one's face toward the light—toward the “Son.” Standing together, they create a community, reminding us that true strength is not only found in reaching for the light but in supporting one another along the way.





Iguazu Falls, Brazil – near the juncture of Brazil, Paraguay, and Argentina

Mist rises and catches the sunlight, forming a rainbow, a reminder of faithfulness, of divine assurance that even in life's storms, light and grace will find their way.



Moraine Lake in Banff, Canada

Moraine Lake is nature's generosity, where peace and splendor overflow with abundance and the soul is restored.



Antelope Canyon in Page, Arizona

This hidden underground gem in the flat, sun-scorched Arizona desert affirms that beauty isn't always on the surface; it's waiting to be discovered below.

Peg Niehaus

Invitation

Rita Pritchard

The Earth

is a magnificent and intricate tapestry of ecosystems, species, and natural resources. As inhabitants of this blue planet, we depend on its health for our well-being. This reflection on a healthy Earth is not merely an environmental discourse but a profound contemplation of our existence, responsibilities, and the legacy we leave for future generations.

As I think about this, I see God in nature.

The sun reflecting off snow. Doves and other birds (especially cardinals) surrounding my new feeder. Beautiful sunsets on the way to the store that took my breath away (as I tried not to run off the road.) and moonlit nights. Bunnies hopping to find food beneath snow-covered ground. Time spent with sisters and nieces at Winterfest at Kings Island. And time spent with them over the holidays.

I have spent the last months of winter enjoying the slower pace and gearing up for all the work we have ahead in the next couple of years. I have also been grieving for all those affected by natural disasters and the disregard for our climate by our government. There have been rays of hope (designating the bald eagle our natural bird, and the outpouring of support for those affected by disasters) but knowing what the new administration wants to do makes me apprehensive. But as SamWise Gamgee says- "There's some hope in this world and it is worth fighting for."

Collective action, through community initiatives, non-governmental organizations, and government policies, amplifies the impact of individual efforts. Collaborative projects, advocacy for environmental legislation, and participation in global environmental movements are essential for driving systemic change. The Healthy Earth Team and all the work we do is what gives me hope. "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future." And it takes a village.

This team and the work we do
gives me hope.

Reflecting on a healthy Earth is an invitation to consider our place within the natural world and our role in its stewardship. The interconnectedness of biodiversity, clean air and water, sustainable agriculture, climate change mitigation, urban planning, and renewable energy highlights the complexity and urgency of maintaining a healthy planet.

As we move forward, it is imperative to embrace sustainable practices, support environmental policies, and foster a culture of respect and care for the Earth. Our collective actions today will determine the legacy we leave for future generations, ensuring that they inherit a vibrant, thriving planet.

Companions, Teachers and Heroes

Laurie Roche

Marjorie Fogg, aka Dee-dah. Walter Bonfoey Stevens, known to all as Bonnie. Robert Terwilligar, aka Mr. T. Annie Dillard. Benjamin Roche. Vincent Van Gogh. Dorothy Stang. Robert Billott. These are my nature companions, teachers, and heroes.

Dee-dah was my childhood companion in the creek and the woods. Nature was the theatre for our games, the place where we were free. Bonnie Stevens was my granddad. I spent part of every summer with him and my grandmother on a lake in northern Michigan. Granddad was a gentle soul; we kids gravitated to him. He loved the hills as much as the lake, and we would roam there with him in the twilight. He called me kindred spirit and told me to never lose my sense of wonder.

Mr. T was my elementary science teacher. He was a pioneer in outdoor education and an unforgettable storyteller. I still have the little book we learned from, *The Web of Life*. Annie Dillard's 1974 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, awakened the naturalist in me. I read it while hiking the Appalachian Trail. Dillard embraced the strangeness of nature and opened my eyes to its wildly enthusiastic extravagance.

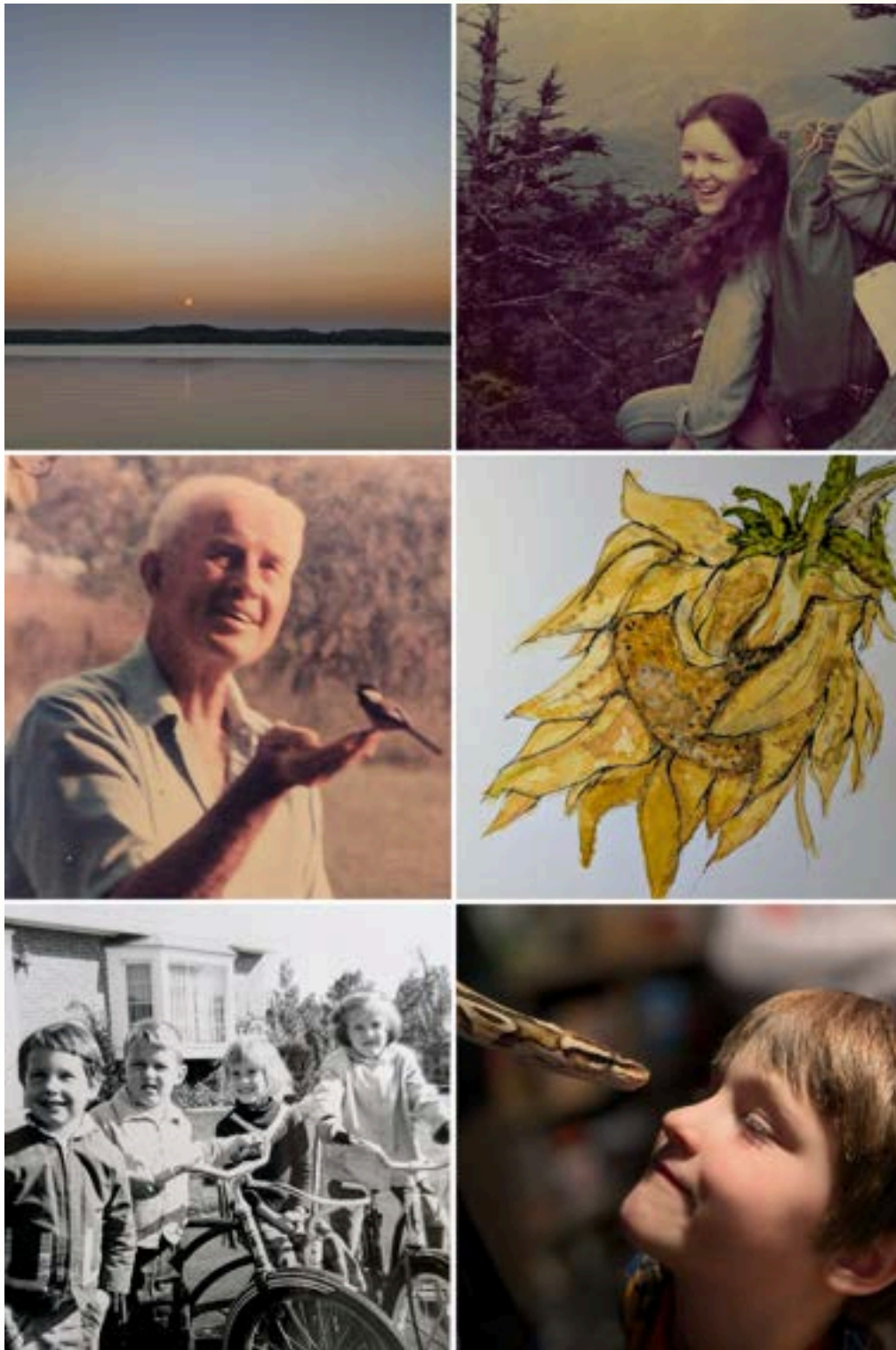
My eight-year-old grandson, Benjamin, has taken Dee-dah's place as my companion in nature. He has amassed innumerable facts about animals and likes to stump me with questions like: "Grammie, can you name five wild cats that can swim?"

Vincent Van Gogh, Dorothy Stang, and Robert Billott share a heroic dedication to their vocation – sacrificing everything, unintimidated by authority, undeterred by persecution. Van Gogh's paintings of trees, flowers, and people working the land are explosions of love and pathos. Sr. Dorothy Stang was an environmental activist and martyr, murdered in 2005 for her protection of the forests and peoples of the Brazilian Amazon. Billott is the Cincinnati lawyer who exposed the harm of PFAS and has spent more than 20 years successfully litigating DuPont on behalf of plaintiffs injured by chemical waste.

Dear guides and heroes, I am humbled by your lives and gifts. Dee-dah, our creek was buried decades ago when a swim club dumped its debris into the woods. But I'll never forget our happy days there. Granddad, I will never lose my sense of wonder, though it is now tinged with sadness. Mr. T, dear teacher, the web of life is unraveling. Benjamin, I will stay positive for your sake, but my heart knows climate chaos will define your life.

In this time of loss, I hope in possibility, in not giving up. The creativity and courage of heroes inspire my own small but persistent efforts.

There are some people who can live without wild things, and some who cannot. These essays are the delights and dilemmas of one who cannot.
Aldo Leopold, A Sand County Almanac



Clockwise from top:

Torch Lake; Me, circa 1980, on the Appalachian Trail;

Drawing of a sunflower in honor of Van Gogh;

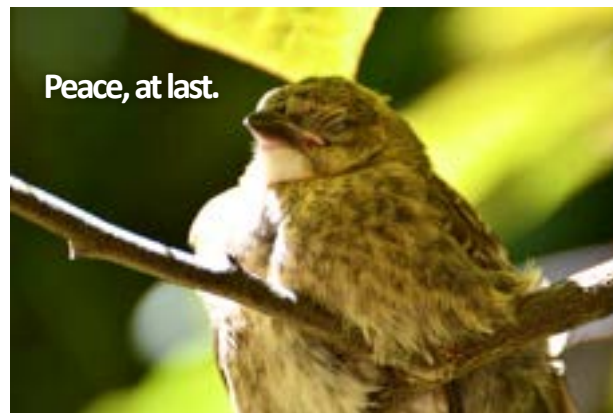
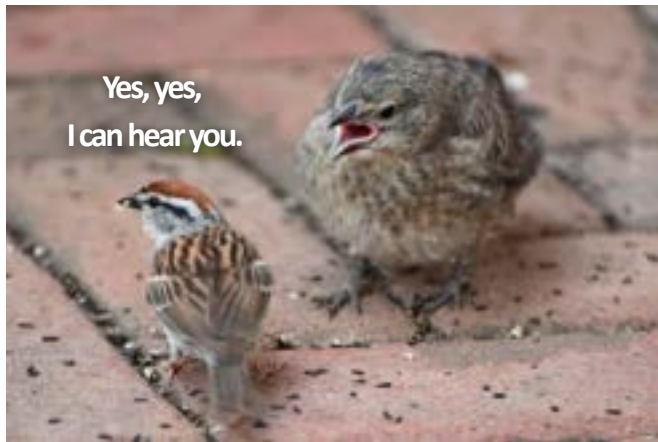
Grandson Benjamin and his pet snake, Beatrice (a rescue);

Childhood friend, Dee-Dah (2nd from right) and me, on the bike; Granddad.

The troublesome baby

Laurie Roche

The other-than-human creatures who share our common home lead lives filled with drama. All around us - mostly unseen by us - are births, deaths, suffering, playfulness, family feuds, battles for dominance, cooperation, even foster parenting. One day I heard squawking on our patio and discovered a large Brown-headed Cowbird fledgling demanding food from its tiny foster mother, a Chipping Sparrow. Cowbirds are one of those species who will lay their eggs in another bird's nest – often the hapless sparrow – and abandon them. Dutifully, the sparrow rears the chicks, but, to my eyes, it looked like foster mom was on her last nerve.

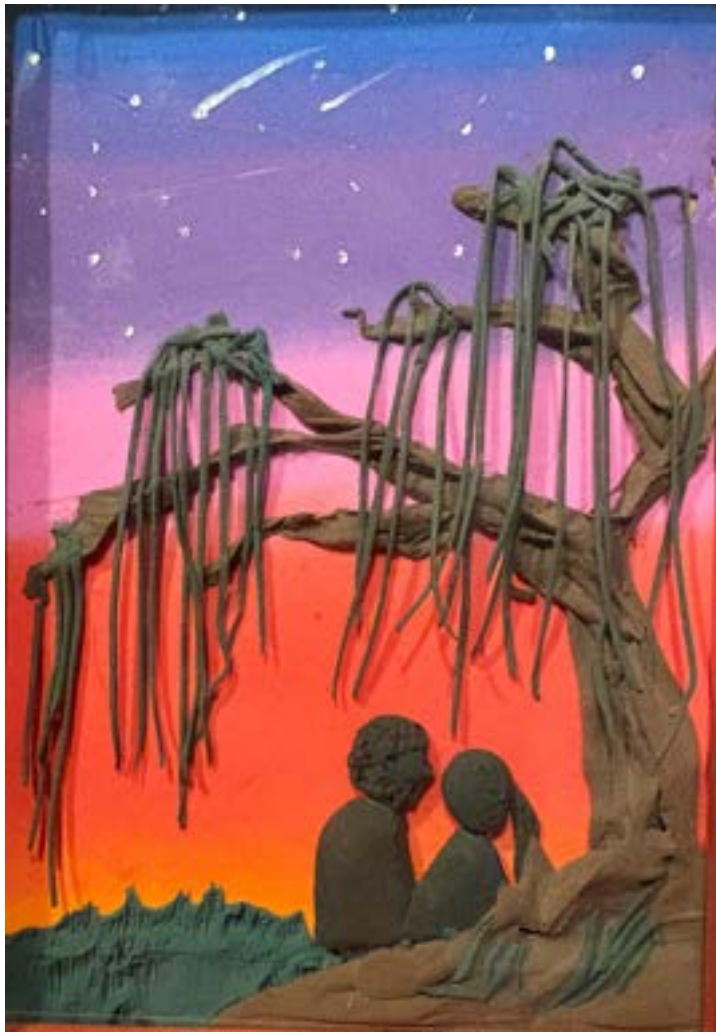




Hannah Sevryn, 7



Leo Sevryn, 10



Xiaodan Zhou



Tim Sevryn

Family Discoveries

Our family loves exploring the world together, from the smallest flowers in our backyard to the grandest of skylscapes!

Sevryn Family

Altar

Jenny Severyn

Moments that feel
like the space between breaths

that feel like
a brief, gripped stillness
weighted with promise for next

like steps to an altar.

A turtle, algae-shawled,
basks on a pond log and
yawns.

July seeps into boardwalk,
the guardrail where I rest my elbows to watch.

Moments that feel like a miracle
like negative space that telescopes
all directions, presses back,
and holds

~ Originally published in Eunoia Review



Nature's Symbiosis

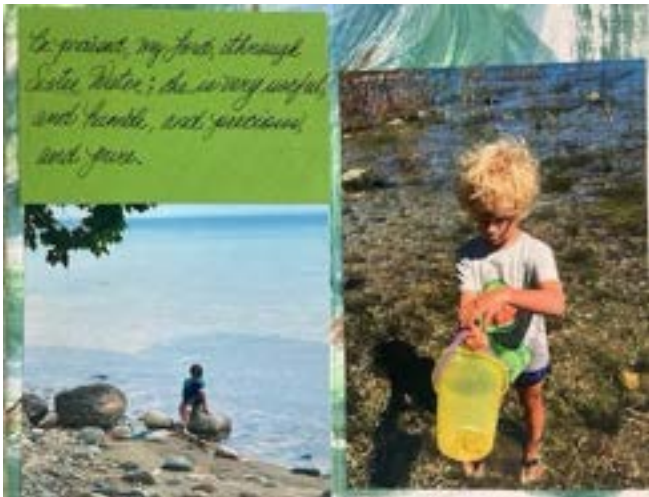
Sue Wilke

Photography is a hobby. I particularly like taking pictures of flowers, all kinds of flowers. These two photos came to mind because they portray the interaction of flowers with a bee and a butterfly. The natural world benefits from these unique relationships which are often ignored if we don't pay attention.



Canticle Book

Mary Lisa Vertuca



Canticle of St. Francis

Mary Lisa Vertuca

I sat in the cool and quiet of the Chapel of Saint Francis in the Basilica in Assisi some years ago . . . probably 12, as our first grandson would have been an infant at the time. My prayers to Saint Francis were simple and heartfelt: please bless our grandson with a love of nature, a love that will sustain him throughout his life.

Please bless our grandson with a love of nature.

And the years have brought us three more grandsons, time spent outdoors in our backyard, their own beautiful green spaces, and two weeks together in Michigan every July. Our time in Michigan brings to life the Canticle verse to Sister Water, as she is so truly very useful, humble, precious, and pure. May those same attributes hold true for Hunter, Ben, Jack and Finn.

Now and forever, Amen.



Healthy Earth Team note: 2025 marks the 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi's composition of the *Canticle of the Creatures*. In popular culture, the poem is romanticized, depicting St. Francis as a mere lover of animals. In truth, it is a song to the intrinsic goodness of all God's creatures; seeing human and other-than-human as one family, with every creature having its own place and purpose, its own right to existence, its own way of manifesting God.

A Blessing for Healers of the Earth

Mike Lacinak

I don't need to announce to you, you of all people, the unquenchable appetite which blinds us to the peril.

So, may your once new eyes that opened in wonder upon that first morning of sun, green and blue now softly gaze still on leaf, light, wing and sky, then sharpen to see the wounding.

May you ever yearn for that encampment your precious young self fashioned with eagerness and friends in that green, cool June forest claiming your home.

May your scarred, toughened skin come alive to that sudden wind in your face one morning as you turn the corner receiving delight in that tender kiss.

May your being absorb that November breeze and sun, swirling your soul clean and warming your blood.

One clear summer night, free of city lights may you look skyward, in awe of that great Love, that heart, which birthed stone and star, seeding everything you may know, imagine and more.

May you feel in your bones that you're kin with feather, fin, claw, fungi, blade, wave and stone, particles present at the ancient birth, attracting, connecting, transforming, becoming the now and not yet.

May you graciously and gratefully receive your gifts - the air of life, wondrous beauty, spirit in the wind, green grace, pure light, crystalline water, fruit of the earth's maternal care.

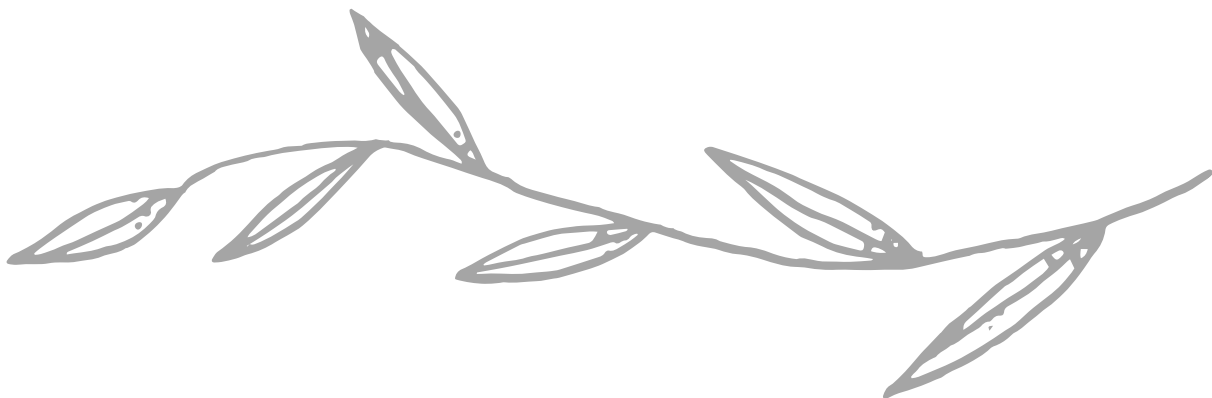
May you be nourished, strengthened and reawakened to your love that you may join in the great work with urgency, heart and patience.

May you be visited when you need it most by hope and the kindred angel of trust.

May your soul, freighted with grief for the world, surrender to the embrace of beauty, of the One who was here in the beginning, whose heart is still pierced, broken open and poured out.

And may you have companions and know the joy of belonging, praise and good work.

May you renew, even at this late date, your sacred vows to the earth, the children, the neighbor and show them your love before it's time to depart.



Mission

The Jesuit Parish Family Healthy Earth Team is our Parish Family's response to Pope Francis' clarion call to ecological conversion issued in his encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. Formed in 2015 at Bellarmine Chapel and re-imagined in 2025 across the Jesuit Parish Family, our mission is to inspire our parish through educational initiatives to connect the tenets of our Catholic faith and the need for action in protecting our common home from ecological exploitation and injustice.



Jesuit Parish Family Healthy Earth Team

**Photo of some of the members during a meeting at the
Nexus Community Garden and Urban Farm**

Foreground:

Tim Severyn, Jesuit Parish Family Director of Sustainability
and Social Mission