



Engaging Aging

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The Grandeur: The God Who Fashioned Beauty

by Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V.

Several years ago in an airport, one of our Sisters met a young man returning from Sedona, Arizona, famous for its glorious landscape of red-hued rocks. He said, still in awe at all he had taken in: "Sister, in Sedona, even if you don't believe in God, you believe in God."

The beauty of nature has the power to lead one to the healing truth of God's goodness and love. Before a sunset, snow-capped mountains, a golden meadow, whatever the scene might be, if we allow ourselves to pause from our busy lives and begin to listen, we are drawn into a mystery accessible to all, a truth that confirms our identity: the wonder and goodness of existence, of being.

Why do our hearts rest and seem more at home before such beauty? The experience of tangible beauty is a natural sacrament, a sign pointing to something (Someone) beyond itself - what is earthly merges with the eternal. Such an experience is restorative to the degree that we allow ourselves to be immersed in the mystery and glory that we, too, exist and are beautiful in the image of the Beauty behind what we receive.

(continued on page 2)

God's

Creation

is one and it is good. The concerns for non-violence, sustainable development, justice and peace, and care for our environment are of vital importance for humanity.

*Pope Benedict XVI
June, 2008*



Mother Agnes Mary Donovan is the first Superior General of the Sisters of Life. Founded on June 1, 1991, by John Cardinal O'Connor, the Sisters of Life is a contemplative/active religious community. Its members' prayers and efforts are directed toward the protection and enhancement of the sacredness of human life.

This article first appeared in the Sisters of Life Newsletter, Fall 2010. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, S.V.

The Grandeur (Continued from page 1)

It's not just nature's beauty that can cause the heart to soar. One of the greatest gifts we have as human beings is the capacity to translate what we experience into art that others, too, might see a glimpse of what we have perceived. Music, painting, and poetry touch and ignite the inner recesses of the heart, bringing us into deeper communion with others in the experience and gift of life.



Culture matters. It is the fruit of our listening to the truth of beauty. The quality of a culture can be measured by the collective joy that overflows in knowing oneself as a recipient of and participant in the abundant goodness of life.

Though our culture seems tormented by counterfeit beauty, the call of what is true and abundantly good continues to ring out with magnified splendor. Those who follow the call with patience and receptivity recognize they will never be the same. Know that our hope and prayer is that you will be stirred to attentiveness to the beauty which is within us, and surrounds us all. God bless you.

Beautiful and Rare by Robert Terry Weston

Beautiful are the youth whose rich emotions flash and burn,
whose lithe bodies filled with energy and grace sway in their happy dance of life;
and beautiful likewise are the mature who have learned compassion and patience,
charity and wisdom, though they be rarer far than beautiful youth.

But most beautiful and most rare is a gracious old age
which has drawn from life the skill to take its varied strands:
the harsh advance of age, the pang of grief, the passing of dear friends, the loss of strength,
and with fresh insight weave them into a rich and gracious pattern all its own.



This is the greatest skill of all,
to take the bitter with the sweet and make it beautiful,
to take the whole of life in all its moods,
its strengths and weaknesses,
and of the whole make one great and celestial
harmony.

Reprinted with permission from "Dealing Creatively with Death: A Manual of Death Education and Simple Burial," by Ernst Morgan, Upper Access Books .

Earth Is A Sacred Community

An Interview with Sister Margaret Mary Landry, O.Carm.

By Sister Andrée Bindewald, O.Carm.

What are some of the readings you have found most significant to you?

The writings of Thomas Berry, who was born the same year I was... have really touched me by helping me to know who I am and where I came from as part of a common spirituality with all creation. There is deep meaning in what God has done for me and for all of us in creation.

At a time when I first resided in a nursing home in New Orleans, I felt isolated, alone, and longed to be part of something. God sent me a young religious sister, a resident with paralysis who was brilliant and had scientific interests. I would read to her a book of her choice alternating with a book of my choice and we would have discussions. The spirituality of creation and the theology of creation merged in those discussions.

Is that relationship and are those discussions part of your life today?

You see the picture of that little gecko on my bureau? I love that little creature. Sometimes looking at it or looking out my window at the many shades of green grass reminds me that earth is a sacred community. All is from God for me and I am filled with gratitude. God has graciously placed me here in this place at this time in these last days of life. My prayer is, "I have so little time, help me to absorb the meaning of this." I talk to God about the other side, however it will be. I will face it as at birth—a new world, a new faith, and hopefully a new strength that gives me the ability to see the spirituality of all creation. The gecko, the flowers, the shades of green in the grass will overwhelm me with joy. I will be aware in that wonderful moment of the work that God does to us and for us. My eyes have been opened to God's creation. Here is the end place for me—it could be any day, any moment, it doesn't matter. All is merging into who God is and who I am. It is all right, God, it is all right. I accept gratefully what is good today.

As we ended our visit, Sister Margaret Mary began to sing... "lose yourself in me and you will find yourself... and you will live, yes, you will live in my love." I was left with two overwhelming impressions. One was her uninterrupted delivery with such precise words and clear thought. She was a perennial teacher. The other was the sense of wholeness Sister had come to in this ending year of her life. She identified as one with all that was around her with appreciation and gratitude. It mattered not whether it be the grass and the birds she viewed from her window, or the sum of her life experiences as she reminisced. All merged into the meaning of who God is and who she is, coming together as one. In the end, she embodied the fullness of all life ready to be birthed into God.



**Sister
Margaret Mary
Landry, O.Carm.
1914–2010**

Aging Engaged



Father Kenan Freson, OFM, is a member of the Franciscan Province of St. John the Baptist in Cincinnati, Ohio. Ordained in 1967, he ministered as a high school educator for fourteen years before being called to internal ministry as the Chief Financial Officer for his province. Fr. Kenan has served in that capacity for twenty-five years.

These days find him working as his community's liaison to sponsored ministries, serving on several boards, and chairing the audit committees. Clearly at home in the world of figures, there is one number he points to with particular delight. "Over the years," he states, "I've planted over 220 trees on our friary property."

What started as an interest during his childhood has matured into a hobby that provides an energizing outlet. "In some ways, it's a bit of a part-time job, but I love it. If it has to do with the outdoors at the friary, I pretty much look after it."

From tractors to trees, he seems to be at home in the midst of it all. Fr. Kenan speaks of the trees he has planted with the familiarity of old friends: Ohio buckeyes and black walnuts raised from seed;

burr oaks started as seedlings the size of pencils, now towering over thirty feet; maples plucked from the edges of woodlands and cultivated in his own tree garden.

"They all take watching," he warns. "Fertilizing, mulching, watering, pruning and spraying are year round jobs." It is as if the tasks have become a sort of liturgy of the hours. From the trees' birth to death and beyond, Fr. Kenan keeps a faithful vigil.

No armchair gardener, this Franciscan. He is as comfortable with a chain saw as he is with a shovel. "When it's necessary, we take them down. For about fifteen years, our own wood has been chipped to use as mulch here on the property of the friary." Much to the delight of the neighbors, the Franciscans offer cut wood free of charge to people who can use it to heat their homes. The only stipulation is that the wood (continued on page 5)



Fr. Kenan Freson and orange tree he planted

Aging Engaged, Father Kenan Freson, OFM (Continued from page 4)

must be used by those who take it, or given freely to those who need it.

Fr. Kenan is quick to say he is not a “landscape architect.” “We like the natural woodsy look here,” he reports. But listening to him describe the hillside along the drive to the friary, it’s clear that he has quite an eye for beauty. Seeing the



Several of the trees planted by Fr. Kenan Freson on friary property

potential of an overgrown area, he used a chainsaw to clear the ground of overgrown honeysuckle in the midst of a winter. Spring proved him right as he found he’d uncovered purple vinca and patches of paper hyacinth that now cover much of the hillside.

Winter doesn’t stop him in the least. He has some remarkable indoor projects as well. “I’ve got some indoor trees that I tend : a calamondin orange tree I started from a cutting now produces enough fruit to fill several bags. And a dwarf date palm has grown so large we can’t keep it indoors anymore.” But as spring approaches, Fr. Kenan says he is “climbing the walls to get outside again.”

“It doesn’t matter what I’m doing. Whenever I’m working outdoors, I always find it quiet and meditative. It has been a good change for me to get out of the office and off the telephone. Somehow, I’m never really alone outdoors. I meet God in nature.”

Thinking back over the 220 trees he has tended, Fr. Kenan mused, “You know, very few of these trees have been lost.” There wasn’t even a touch of pride in his voice, just a spirit of awe in the face of God’s creation. Would that we could all proclaim the same. Well done, Fr. Kenan!

What You Can Do



Clean Closets: “That bread which you keep, belongs to the hungry; that coat which you preserve in your wardrobe, to the naked; those shoes which are rotting in your possession, to the shoeless; that gold which you have hidden in the ground, to the needy.” St. Basil

Watch Water: Simply turning off the faucet while brushing your teeth or shaving conserves 1/2 gallon of water.

Share Stories: Tell each other what you’re doing to tend God’s creation. Challenge one another to better stewardship of our gifts.

From the Editor's Desk

Sister Sherryl White, csj, Ph.D., Psychologist, Pittsburgh, PA



Synchronicity is defined as the coincidence of events that seem related, but are not obviously caused by the other. I'll bet that you've felt it at one time or another. You're sitting in a meeting and someone says exactly what you're thinking. You talk to someone on the phone for the first time, then two days later, meet them unexpectedly, both of you hundreds of miles from home. You start out in one direction, but mysteriously find yourself on another journey just by following what you believe are God's leadings. That's a bit of what my experience has been like while working on this issue of *Engaging Aging*. Somewhere along the line, I stopped trying to connect the dots and just went with the flow.

I think you'll be touched by the profound reflections offered in our lead article by Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, Superior General of the Sisters of Life. Equally remarkable is the faith of her Sisters as they live the foundations of a new community in our Church.

The poem by Robert Terry Weston, featured on page 2, was sent to us in the midst of our planning by Sister Rose Mary Dougherty, SSND. Without knowing our needs, her suggestion fit the bill perfectly.

Father Kenan Freson, OFM, was not the person we expected to feature in "Aging Engaged" on page 4. Instead, he was our first contact as one who might be able to refer us to environmental projects being done by religious communities. Fr. Kenan had several leads for us, but as we became acquainted and he shared his own story, he seemed to be the perfect choice for our feature article. It took a bit of coaxing to

move him beyond his humble reluctance, but we think you'll be delighted with his experiences as a tender of trees.

Of particular note is our experience with the article on page 3, "Earth is a Sacred Community." On a regular basis, we scan publications of religious communities, watching for interesting articles to pass along to our readers. Recently, we came across the interview with Sister Margaret Mary Landry, O.Carm. We were impressed by her transparency and progressive thinking. We particularly enjoyed her thoughts about "the other side." It was an easy decision to file the article for future use.

When we chose the "Green" theme for this spring issue, Sister Margaret Mary's comments about creation seemed a perfect fit. So, we pulled the article and began our background research. Much to our dismay, we discovered that Sister Margaret Mary had passed away on December 30, 2010.

Nonetheless, we decided that we still wanted to share the interview with you. In fact, Sister's reflections seemed to take on new significance. During this time when the Church invites us deeply into the Paschal Mystery, we thought, perhaps, the voice of one so close to death could teach us about our vocation. In the face of global crises and unbounded tragedy in Japan, now more than ever, we are called to be Easter people, embracing the hope of the Risen Christ. May these days of Lent be blessed and our Easter Alleluia proclaim life! May all be well.

From the Offices of NRRO

Brother Robert Metzger, SM
Associate Director of Planning & Education



The focus of this issue of *Engaging Aging* is the beauty of earth and a reminder that we are stewards of God’s creation. As Pope Benedict XVI said in his World Day of Peace Message: “The Church has a responsibility towards creation, and she considers it her duty to exercise that responsibility in public life, in order to protect earth, water and air as gifts of God the Creator meant for everyone.”

As I write this we are celebrating Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the season of Lent. Lent is an appropriate time of the year to reflect on God’s creation and our part in sustaining it for future generations. Spring is just around the corner and we will see this creation in all its

splendor throughout nature.

There are several resources available to aid us in a Lenten reflection on creation. I entered the phrase “Lenten reflections on creation and ecology” into my internet search engine and received more than one million hits. The concern for creation is present in our world. A possible task for our Lenten journey is to make it our personal concern and choose our course of action.

I pray that you have a happy Lenten journey as we prepare for Christ’s resurrection on Easter.



Brain Teaser

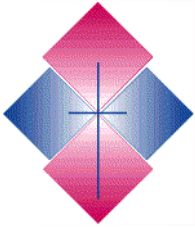
The United States Geological Survey estimates that on average, 15,140 drips from a faucet equal one gallon of water. If you count only 20 drips per minute coming from that sink in your room, how much water is being wasted? Circle the correct answer:

- (a) 28,800 drops of water per day
- (b) 1 gallon of water per day
- (c) 7 liters of water per day
- (d) 13 baths per year
- (e) 694 gallons of water per year

ANSWER: All of the above! Become part of the solution and make a difference. Stop those leaks!

March 31	Direct Care Assistance applications due at NRRO
March 31	Retirement Fund for Religious collection proceeds due
April 5-7	Planning & Implementation Workshop; Menlo Park, CA
Mid May	Retirement Needs Analysis mailed
June	Distribution of Direct Care Assistance





National Religious Retirement Office
3211 Fourth Street, N.E.
Washington, DC 20017-1194
Phone: (202) 541-3215
Fax: (202) 541-3053
Website: www.usccb.org/nrro

The National Religious Retirement Office coordinates the national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious and distributes this money to eligible religious institutes for their retirement needs.

The National Religious Retirement Office supports, educates and assists religious institutes in the U.S. to embrace their current retirement reality and to plan for the future.

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