



# CARE FOR CREATION AT BETHANY

A Ministry of the Religious of Jesus and Mary in Highland Mills, NY



## Upcoming Events

4/29: Arbor Day Celebration  
see pg. 3 for details

Fall 2023: Sustainable Business  
Seminar with Tracey  
Niemothko, JD, CPA and  
Moira Tolan, PhD

## Spring Has Sprung

Here at Bethany, it is the old magnolia tree that first announces to us the arrival of spring! This year, even in the midst of the “traditional” March snow storm, the little magnolia buds are held tight, firm, and serene by the life rising within the branches. It is the ancient life that the buds experience – the life that filled the “tree of life” in that first garden. It is the goodness of the Creator that holds them secure and enables them to flower – the goodness that flows through all of Creation.

Actually, there are two great magnolia trees in this corner of the property, protected by the walls of the main house. Two years ago, one of them had to be cut down to a pathetic stump because its branches were destroying the roof of the building.

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All things share the same breath – the beast, the tree, the man, the air shares its spirit with all the life it supports. - Chief Seattle, Suquamish

## Committee Member Highlight



Sr. Diane Dube,  
RJM

Sr. Diane was born in Fall River, MA and was educated by the Religious of Jesus and Mary in her youth. She entered this community after high school and was an elementary school educator and administrator for

many years. In her later years she served as an administrative assistant at Boston College School of Theology and Ministry and lived at Sophia House, a house of discernment for women interested in religious life.

Bethany became a very special place for Diane many years ago when the novices were brought there to "help out" each summer. She has fond memories of walking in the woods, swimming and boating on the lake, and socializing around a campfire at the boathouse. Her lived experience and the desire to live out the mission of Pope Francis' letter, *Laudato Si*, are the source of her motivation to preserve the mission and biodiversity that are part of Bethany for children of our present age and for children of the future.



## Spring Continued...

This was a heartbreaking "death". But, astoundingly, that stump has come back to life, not as one tree, but as four possible trees!

For more than 100 years, these two trees have sheltered the ministries on this property:

- Thevenet Hall Academy (1914 to 1971)
- Parish Religious Education (1915 to 2016)
- Thevenet Montessori School (1971 to the present)
- Bethany Spirituality Center (1972 to 2012)



When, as with the Magnolia tree, it was necessary to put an end to three of these ministries, their roots – i.e. the inner drive to witness to the Divine Goodness – were not destroyed. At the same time that the seemingly dead Magnolia stump was regrouping its life energies, the Religious of Jesus and Mary were doing the same thing with their ministerial energies. At the same time that the strong stump was sending up its first tentative shoots, the nascent Care for Creation ministry became a new shoot from the RJM ministry roots. Bethany's past educational and spiritual ministries had already sunk deep roots in such areas as retreats on the Goodness of our Creator, seminars on justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC), and building an excellent JPIC library.

This spring, the four baby Magnolia trees have become a proliferous array of shoots. These must be shaped and pruned to form something new. It will be different from the first tree, but true to its 100 year old roots, and vibrant with the ancient and always-new life-force. So too, the young ministry, Care for Creation at Bethany, is exploding with possibilities for its future growth, but it must now be shaped and pruned to become what the Divine Gardener is envisioning for this new ministry.

We hope that as we go forward, all of you, our friends, will be part of this discernment and labor of shaping and pruning.





## Join us for our first in-person event! April 29, 2023

Care for Creation at Bethany invites you to a special event to celebrate the 150th Arbor Day with us!

Bring your children and grandchildren and join tree specialist Kayel Conklin for a guided walk in the woods at Bethany. Learn more about the beauty and importance of our local trees. The day will also include tree-themed activities for kids, and a tree planting to commemorate the first official Care for Creation event and the 150th Anniversary of Arbor Day.

**Place:** Bethany Center

15 Bethany Dr. Highland Mills, NY 10930

**Time:** 1-4pm

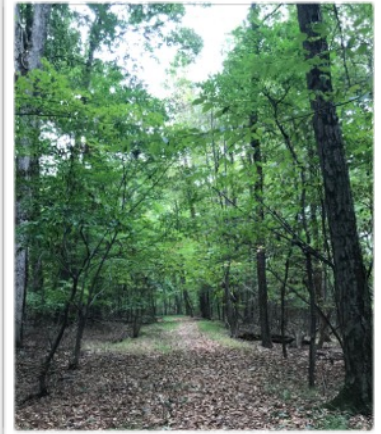
**Date:** Saturday, April 29, 2023

**Pre-registration required! Please register by call or text:**

Louise Pisano

845-541-1492

Contact [carersofcreation.bethany@gmail.com](mailto:carersofcreation.bethany@gmail.com) with questions.



### Arbor Day Activities for Families and Children

Arbor Day is an annual holiday focused on appreciating and planting trees. This year, it will be celebrated world-wide on Friday, April 28 with 44 countries observing the day. The first documented Arbor Day celebration was in Mondoñedo, Spain in 1594. In the United States, it was first celebrated in Nebraska in 1872. Today, the Arbor Day Society is celebrating its 150th anniversary.

Some ways to celebrate Arbor Day as a family:

- Attend the Care for Creation at Bethany Arbor Day Event: April 29<sup>th</sup>, from 1 to 4 pm
- Read about Arbor Day and its fascinating history: <https://www.arborday.org/>
- Check out a book about trees from the library such as: *Kate Who Tamed the Wind* by Liz Garton Scanlon and Lee White; *I Can Name 50 Trees Today* by Bonnie Worth; *The Little Tree* by Loren Long; *Be a Friend to Trees* by Holly Keller; *We Planted a Tree* by Diane Muldrow
- Investigate together the ways in which trees help us and why we need trees in our lives, near our homes, around our neighborhoods, and on our planet.
- If you have a tree (or trees) on your property, introduce it to your children as an important and beloved part of your family, and tell its story. Create a physical or digital record of this story.
  - Who planted it and why? When was it planted? How many generations of your family has it sheltered? Has your tree gone through events that threatened its life (e.g. a bad storm, a disease)? What kind of tree is it? What are its special gifts? How has your tree shown its care for your family?

Has your tree sheltered and been part of important family events? How can you protect it as it grows?

-Plant a Tree: choose a tree together and plant it. Involve everyone in the entire planting process; from planning, digging, watering, and day-to-day care. Log how the tree changes over time in your own "Tree Journal." Be sure to explain that this tree's life is beloved by God and is to be cherished.



## Invasive Species at Bethany



*Close up of Wisteria bushes taking over patch of forest.*



*Stand of trees getting totally overrun by Wisteria vines.*



*Thick Wisteria vines strangling an oak.*



*Progress - portion of area cleared by Arturo and Sr. Teresita.*

Renewing the health of the Bethany property ecosystems is an essential goal of Care for Creation at Bethany. Over thousands of years, native species have worked together to create home-places where the lives of all members – from single-cell to complex organisms – are sustained by exquisite and delicate balances of giving and receiving. But humans have introduced aggressive, non-native plants and vines that destroy this balance by crowding out native species. Thus, continuous care and full management on the part of humans has become essential to combat this attack. On Bethany's property, at present, the main invasive species present are wisteria, ragweed, and Japanese stiltgrass.

Wisteria destroys forests and the focus at Bethany is on saving the hardwood, oak-dominated woodland which reaches down to the lake shore. Wisteria was introduced to the property by the former owners of that segment of the land. It was an ornamental vine over the main door of their hotel, which burned down in the early 1900's. The Religious of Jesus and Mary later purchased this adjoining property, but the fast-growing wisteria had already taken deep root and was spreading. The war against wisteria has been raging ever since and there is, as yet, no decisive winner. However, we advise you to put your money on local landscaper Arturo with his machete and Sr. Teresita with her clippers! With the help of volunteers from the Social Action Committee of St. Joseph Parish, New Paltz, hundreds of pounds of wisteria has been removed and properly disposed.

Ragweed is an invasive species that took over the meadows at Bethany in the last 5 years. It is the primary culprit of fall allergies and its flowers do not contain nectar and do not support pollinators. The sight of its thick root system can make even the seasoned gardener shudder. However, it cannot survive the winter except by seeds, so if the flowers are cut down prior to seed formation, the plant cannot return. Our team has worked hard to remove over 30 large wheelbarrows full of ragweed to start restoring our beautiful meadows.

Japanese stiltgrass is a new comer. The species became recognized as invasive around 1919 when it was introduced to the US as packing material for porcelain imported from China. Japanese stiltgrass is a prolific seeder and propagates at an astounding rate, but it is an annual and easily pulled out if one doesn't get initially overwhelmed by the overnight appearance of huge swaths of the shoots. 20 plants can be uprooted in one minute! On the Bethany property, the stiltgrass has been proliferating in the garden areas and on the woodland paths.

Thanks to a grant from the RJM Ministry Fund, stipended gardeners are working with Sr. Teresita to stem these invasions and it is estimated that control of these 3 species will be achieved by Fall 2024. We welcome the assistance of any individual or group in this endeavor. Please email Louise at [carersofcreation.bethany@gmail.com](mailto:carersofcreation.bethany@gmail.com) with inquiries.



## Earth Day Activities for Families and Children

**April 22, 2023**

- Make and/or decorate your own reusable bags to bring shopping to decrease plastic bag use
  - Build a DIY home for bees, pollinators, and insects
  - Plant a tree, flowers, or vegetable garden
  - Walk or bike somewhere instead of driving
  - Identify one area in your life/home that could be more environmentally friendly and come up with one easy improvement
- or
- Check out Earth Day's list of "52 Actions and Tips to Make a Difference" and choose 1 or more to implement for the rest of the year
  - Look into local composting systems to decrease your food waste

For tools, resources, and information about Earth Day, visit [www.earthday.org](http://www.earthday.org).

## Earth Day 2023 - Saturday, April 22, 2023

2023 Theme: "Invest in Our Planet"

EARTHDAY.ORG, the world's largest recruiter to the environmental movement, works with more than 150,000 partners in nearly 192 countries. More than 1 billion people now participate in Earth Day activities, making it the largest civic observance in the world.



Human influence is unequivocally to blame for the warming of the planet and the sad truth is that some forms of climate disruption will be felt for centuries to come. We must collectively create a 21st century economy that restores the health of our planet, protects our species, and provides opportunities for all.

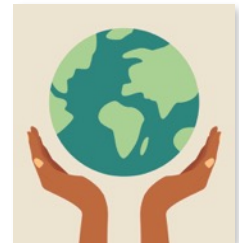
Governments around the globe enacted many significant Green Policy Initiatives in 2022. It is possible to keep global warming below 1.5C. However, nearly every country in the world is not yet on track to meet Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Neutrality by 2050.

Significant action is needed now and businesses, governments, and civil society are equally responsible for taking action against the climate crisis and accelerating change towards a green, prosperous, and equitable future.

- Governments must incentivize their citizens, businesses, and institutions to create the framework for an equitable and sustainable global economic system.
- Businesses, inventors, investors, and financial markets must drive value for their institutions and society through green innovation and practices.
- Individual citizens must push for sustainable solutions across the board as voters and consumers. It requires the collective will and voice of the people to make the changes the planet needs.

Overcoming climate change is within reach if we work together to commit to action and invest in our planet and our collective future.

Excerpts Taken from: <https://www.earthday.org>



Care For Creation  
at Bethany

In response to the 2023 Earth Day Theme, a seminar for local businesses will be offered in the Fall at Bethany by Tracey Niemotko, JD, CPA and Moira Tolan, PhD on sustainability Business Accounting.

Date: TBA

## Committee Member Highlight

Originally from southeastern Pennsylvania, Tom moved to Ulster County, New York 37 years ago when he began the position of Director of Youth Ministry for the Vicariate of Ulster which he held for 16 years. He served for 18 years as the Executive Director of Capuchin Youth & Family Ministries in Garrison, NY. Presently, Tom ministers as a Faith Formation Specialist in the Department of Youth Faith Formation in the Archdiocese of New York.



Tom Brinkman

Tom has been happily married to Julie (also a member of CFC@B committee) for 35 years. They have two wonderful children, Ananda and Jeremy.

Why does Tom serve on a care for creation committee? His faith compels him to be responsible for this beautiful gift of God that creation is. He enjoys hiking, biking, and running. Tom's ideal for a vacation is to be in some mountainous region where he can hike and be in unspoiled nature. Tom and Julie's home is a place of beauty and rest on five wooded acres where they experience God's love and care in the interconnectedness of life. He feels responsible to care for the miraculous gift of creation and, for the sake of the common good, to hand it on to others.

Exodus 3:12 is among his favorite quotes from the Bible. "I will be with you." When Moses hears God's call, he asks God for some assurance. God does not promise that it will be easy or without struggle. Rather God promises, "I will be with you." That is all Moses will need. Tom tries to live that this is all he needs. God is faithful. And that is Tom's goal in life.

## Laudato Si' Quick Study

In Chapter 2 of *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis makes clear that our faith informs the responsibility of believers to care for creation. Quoting Pope St. John Paul II, he reminds us: "Christians... 'realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith.'" (64) Our faith is abundantly clear that creation is a gift to be shared not only with our contemporaries but with succeeding generations. Likewise, our relationship must be one of both stewardship and kinship, not absolute domination over other creatures." (67) We are created and called to be in a "relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature." (67) God created a world of mutuality: we care for creation; creation cares for us.

Ours is a faith that does not justify destroying the earth because God is creating a new heaven and earth. "...the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures." (68) Yes, humans are at the pinnacle of creation, but "The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us." (83) Rather, we have a privileged role in leading and moving with all creation toward God, creation's ultimate end and purpose.

Firmly rooted in the rich tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, indeed the teaching of our faith from the beginning, Francis reminds us that God created the world for everyone. This social perspective links faith and care for the poor and marginalized, and now illuminates our duty to care for creation. "The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all." (95) Failure to respect creation dishonors the creator who gave it to us as a gift for all. Neglecting the creator leads to the degradation of the relationship of mutual responsibility between humans, and between humans and creation.

Pope Francis ends this chapter by focusing our gaze on Jesus. In His life he personified harmony with both the creator and creation. We understand that in His glorification "All things have been created through Him and for Him." Col 1:16 May our gazing on Christ lead us to care for all the gifts we have been given in Him.







## The Dive with John Kramer

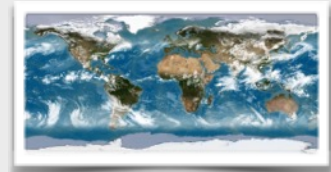
*Mother Earth is an ocean of information & wisdom. John invites you to dive into each topic, explore, ponder, & add your research to our Facebook page*

This issue's "Dive" is into mycelia (mushrooms), the fungi kingdom.

What is the largest living being on earth? A mushroom!! Its size is 3.5 square miles, it lives in Oregon's Malheur National Forest, and it is about 10,000 years old. Mushrooms are called "the brains of the forest" and those found in "old growth" forests are the wisest, holding indispensable knowledge of the earth's ecosystems. In a drought their vast root system sends information to their whole ecosystem on how to survive, directing underground sources of water to the plants that most need it and sending messages to other plants to drink less. Mushrooms are the essential recyclers of the forests. They feed on all that is decomposing and can even transform toxic pollutants like PCB's into a non-toxic form of food. Mushrooms do not release oxygen; they are excellent carbon absorbers.

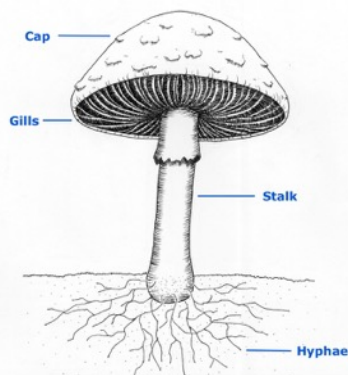
*To continue your "dive", google: calabogie-hiker-fungi-the-brains-of-the-forest  
To share your "dive" discoveries, visit our Facebook Page: Cfc Bethany*

John Kramer is a New York native and resident of the Hudson Valley. He is a husband, father, grandfather, life-long student of nature and history, carpenter, musician, and camper.



## Fun Fungi Facts

- A fungus is a simple organism, or living thing, that is neither a plant nor an animal.
- Fungi generally consist of a mass of threadlike strands called hyphae. The mass of hyphae, called the mycelium, is the main body of the fungus.
- Most fungi feed on dead plant and animal material. The hyphae release digestive enzymes into the organic matter on which they grow. The enzymes digest the matter, which is absorbed by the fungi.
- Fungi help the environment by breaking down fallen trees, animal droppings, and other dead matter.
- A fungus usually reproduces by forming spores. Wind, water, and insects carry spores away. If a spore lands in a damp place, it can grow into a new fungus.



-Some fungi can be eaten (mushrooms, truffles); some are used in bread making (yeast); some (like certain molds) are used in medicine, like penicillin.

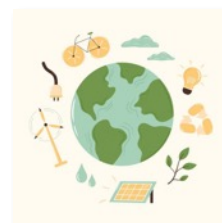
-Fungus and Trees: A Symbiotic Relationship - Trees obtain nutrients that the fungi acquire from the soil, such as nitrogen and phosphorus – and in return, the fungi receive carbon-rich sugar from the trees' roots.

[https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/fungus/353159;](https://kids.britannica.com/kids/article/fungus/353159)  
<https://www.bbc.com/news/8-fantastic-facts-about-fungi>

## Easy Climate Change Prevention Tips for Kids and Families

- Turn off the lights.
- Close doors immediately so heat does not escape
- Take short showers
- Walk or bike if you can
- Turn off your computer or other appliances when not in use
- Convince the people around you to be more energy conscious.
  - Replace incandescent or fluorescent lights with better LED lights
  - Ask your parents not to leave the car idling
  - Run the dishwasher and other appliances on energy saver mode
  - Start a conservation club at school to raise awareness and have your school reduce energy consumption

<https://www.amnh.org/explore/ology/earth/ask-a-scientist-about-our-environment/how-can-kids-help-prevent-global-warming>





## Movie Recommendations!

As we think about starting spring gardens, our goal is to learn more about soil and its importance for growing food, and improving climate health. But, snow and mud covers most of the ground around us and temperatures are still chilly.

Therefore, we are doing most of this learning from our couches. We are loving the following films...

### *Kiss the Ground*

"This film shows that our soils may be almost completely depleted of microbes as a result of chemical conventional agriculture, but with [a process called] bio sequestration... global warming can be reversed."

### *The Biggest Little Farm*

"This film is about a couple named John and Molly Chester who made a promise to build a life in perfect harmony with nature...a farm with different plants, wildlife and livestock all working together..."

<https://soillearningcenter.com/6-must-watch-regenerative-documentaries-for-soil-lovers-globally/>



## A Prayer for Love for all God's Creatures

Most High, almighty, good Lord,  
Praise, glory, honor, and all blessings are yours

...

Praised be to you, my Lord. from our Sister Mother Earth,  
Who nourishes and sustains us,  
And brings forth her various fruits, with many-colored  
flowers and grasses.

...

Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks  
And may you serve him with great humility.

- From St. Francis's Canticle of the Sun

Translation from "Francis of Assisi and His "Canticle of Brother Sun Reassessed" by Brian Maloney

## Scripture Reflection

### "God's Word Creates"

Psalm 1:3 "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper".

The Care for Creation group has become that "tree" planted near the "rivers of water" at Bethany and "prospered" by the hard work from its volunteers, donations of others, and blessings from the Creator above. As a result, the season has come for its fruitage to blossom, and we look forward to sharing it with visitors at our next event.

This fruitage will be shared this Spring at our celebration of the 150th Arbor Day event to foster communing with nature & its Divine Creator. Please see pg. 3 for further details about this event.





## *Our Mission*

To foster the Integrity of Creation and the care for our common home by using what we have in the property and facilities at Bethany in response to the call of Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* and the priorities of the Religious of Jesus and Mary.



## *Contact Us*

**Email:** [carersofcreation.bethany@gmail.com](mailto:carersofcreation.bethany@gmail.com)

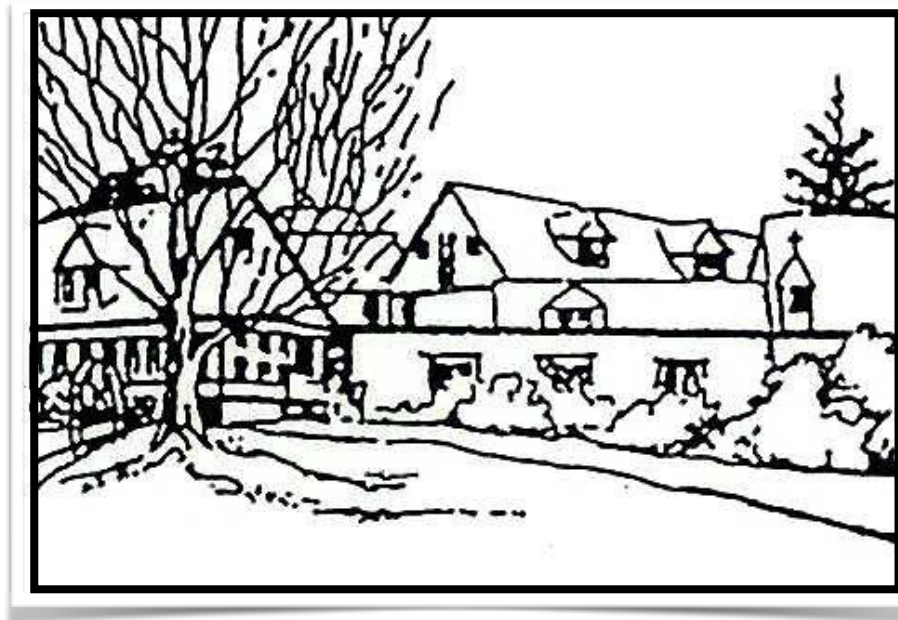
**Facebook Page:** Cfc Bethany

**Website:** Coming Soon

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## *Credits*

Written Contributions From: Sr. Teresita Morse, RJM, Louise Pisano, Tom Brinkmann, David Niemotko, Sr. Diane Dube, RJM, and Katie Williams

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