



CARE FOR CREATION AT BETHANY

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



Upcoming Events

Arbor Day Celebration at Bethany

Sunday, May 4th from
1:00-3:30pm

Learn more on page 7

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Excerpts from “An Easter Message About Our Relationship With Our Planet — And Each Other”

*By Trevor Neilson (President of Prometheus Hyperscale; Co-Founder of WasteFuel;
Chair of APCO Climate and Biodiversity; and Co-Founder i(x) of Net Zero)*

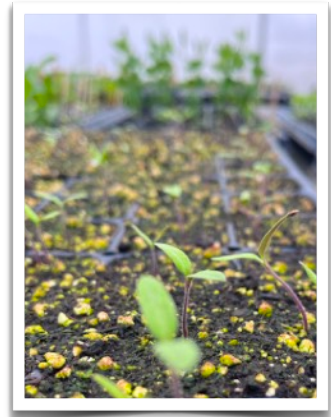
“Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

These words from the Bible echo the potential for transformation that lies at the heart of the Easter narrative. It’s a reminder that no matter how dire our circumstances, there is always room for renewal and change. This message is particularly resonant as we confront the ravages of climate change—rising seas, devastating wildfires, and the relentless march of desertification, which threaten the very fabric of life on Earth...



“Excerpts” continued

The parallel between Easter’s message of rebirth and our battle against climate change is stark. Just as the tomb was found empty, signaling hope and renewal, our current trajectory of environmental degradation and neglect can be reversed, revealing a path to a sustainable future. It’s a path that demands we roll away the stone of indifference and emerge from the trap of short-termism, embracing instead the light of renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and equitable economic practices.



Easter teaches us about sacrifice and the power of transcendent hope. In the context of climate change, this translates to a willingness to alter our lifestyles and economic systems for the greater good. “For God so loved the world...” (John 3:16) isn’t just a testament to divine love but a call to action for all of us to cherish and preserve our world. The challenge of climate change requires a global response, underpinned by the principles of justice and equity—ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable among us, who have contributed the least to this crisis, are not left to bear the brunt of its effects. . . .

To build a more sustainable and equitable world, we must draw on the wellspring of innovation, courage, and collective action. We must marry the wisdom of tradition with the innovations of the modern age. Renewable energy technologies, such as solar and wind power, offer us the means to power our world without degrading it. Sustainable agriculture practices promise a way to feed our planet’s growing population without stripping its natural resources bare. And green urban planning stands as a testament to our ability to live in harmony with the environment, rather than at odds with it.

The Easter story, with its profound message of renewal, challenges us to envision a world reborn from the ashes of environmental despair. It calls us to act with conviction and hope, to rebuild our world in a manner that is sustainable, just, and reflective of our shared humanity. As we celebrate Easter, let us remember that the power of rebirth and renewal is not confined to ancient texts or religious traditions. It is a living, breathing call to action—a reminder that even in the face of overwhelming darkness, the promise of a new dawn remains.

Originally published on [Medium.com](https://www.medium.com) on Mar 31, 2024 and shared here with his permission.



Grounds and Growth: A CfC@B Update

By Sr. Teresita Morse, RJM

It's springtime and Care for Creation at Bethany is entering a new phase of development since starting four years ago.

We give thanks for the many blessings of our foundation stage: a wise, supportive RJM Leadership Team, a dedicated,

talented Steering Committee; much-needed financial support from the RJM Ministry Grant; practical and creative guidance from Mt. St. Mary College Accounting and Finance Department; generous volunteer assistance from the St. Patrick's Parish Knights of Columbus; friendship and collaboration with the Woodbury Climate Smart Committee; and wonderful program participants and friends from many walks of life.



During these first 4 years, our emphasis has been on “grounding”—both literally and figuratively. The biodiversity of woodlands and meadows was being threatened by heavy infestations of invasive species. Without this biodiversity there is no integral creation to care for. The battle is not over by any means, but it is being won, inch by inch, tree by tree, and insect by insect.

As we begin the next dimension in the growth process, we are putting our primary focus on programming and on inviting people to come, enjoy the beauty of God's Creation, and listen to the Lord speaking living Words through the amazing diversity of creatures created by the Divine Hands. A Program Director has already been hired to work with the CfC@B Director and Committee in planning and offering events. To enable even greater impact, the RJMs are also in process of hiring an Executive Director to facilitate the united growth of all aspects of ministry on this land.

Care for Creation at Bethany moves forward with trust in the Holy Spirit – the Life-Giver. The Bethany of the Gospels was a rejuvenating home-place for Jesus. We hope to offer that kind of environment for our human guests as well as for all living creatures who make up the fabric of life here.



Cromwell Lake – a Hidden Jewel

By Bonny Hart in collaboration with Sr. Doris Bissonnette, RJM

You can't see it from any road. You can't even see it from the main part of Bethany's property or the Montessori school. But as you twist downhill on the lane, it will appear: a sparkling little gem—Cromwell Lake.

It is mostly surrounded by woods with the now defunct Ace Farms running up to the shore at the south end. There are only a few houses on the lake, and if you squint, you can pretend you're way up in the north woods.

If you paddle to the middle of the lake, you can see the ridge of Schunnemunk Mountain. The pink-stoned mountain has many well-known hiking trails even if it now seems to be sprouting more and more cell towers.

Although there's no official access, fishermen always find a way. There are no gasoline motors allowed on the lake, but you might see tiny electric motors, paddles, or oars on everything from rowboats to kayaks. They come mainly for the largemouth bass, which can be quite impressive given they were spawned in such a tiny lake.

The lake has had several lives. It is on the land of the Lenni-Lenapi nation that includes the Munsee and the Ramapoughs. By the 1700s, Europeans were established here. The lake had interim names of Slaughter's Pond and Hazard's Pond after early settlers, but local landowner Oliver Cromwell (I can't prove that he's no relation!) won out. Much of the later history depended on the building of the railroads. The New York and Erie Railroad began operating in the area in 1841, but it wasn't until 1869 that Highland Mills and Central Valley got their own stations allowing the population of Cromwell Lake to increase.

New Program Director at CfC@B!

We are happy to announce the onboarding of Dr. Anne Wibiralske, who will serve as Program Director. Projects and goals that Dr. Anne



will be focusing on include:

- Plan and develop integral ecological workshops, retreats, and programs
- Facilitate collaborations and coalitions with community environmental, religious, and civic organizations
- Develop native plant ecosystem landscaping on the Bethany campus
- Assist with computer systems setup, software upkeep and website development

We are very much looking forward to having Dr. Anne on the team and to sharing her progress in future newsletters.

Use Our Space for Your Program

Did you know that CfC@B has a variety of spaces and resources available to meet a diverse range of needs?

Use our space for your upcoming retreats, classes, or workshops. Reach out to Louise for details of a copy of our brochure at carersofcreation.bethany@gmail.com.

*Cromwell Lake cont.*

This began a period of heavy usage and tourism which saw Cromwell Lake flourish. It was pre-automobile days and families were eager for a way to flee the sticky heat of New York City. At one time there were two large hotels right on the lake shore. Hillcrest Hall and the 6-storey Cromwell Lake House could each serve more than a hundred guests. They offered boating and swimming, of course, but also a golf course, baseball diamond, and a casino. There was even a tobogganing slide that ended with a splash in the lake.

The automobile ended that train-dependent era. Buildings were abandoned or burned down and weren't profitable to replace. Bungalow colonies became popular. A few of the colonies still exist in one form or another, but for the most part, the lake has grown quiet.

Over the last 60 years, the little lake has faced large challenges. Manure run-off from surrounding farms polluted the water and increased algae blooms. Rapid urban sprawl has strained the water supply and destroyed valuable habitats.

While not a problem unique to Cromwell Lake, an invasive plant species called Eurasian Water Chestnut is further threatening the ecosystem. The leaves of this especially noxious plant grow in dense rosettes that can be two feet in diameter. Each plant produces up to 12 vicious seeds with sharp, thorny spines that are dangerous if stepped on. Each seed can be viable for up to 12 years. The plant's rapid spread forms mats that shade out native species and make swimming and boating impossible.

Despite these formidable problems, Cromwell Lake remains a jewel, and there is hope. Efforts to monitor and treat the lake have been ongoing, starting in the 1985 with local residents meeting to discuss the issues and proposing solutions like treating the lake with copper sulfate to control algae. Currently, the Village of Woodbury, which owns the lake, has been very supportive in its efforts to find funding to restart the cleanup of the lake. Although this is not a one-fix problem, it is a very encouraging start to what we hope will be a successful process that will restore our beautiful little lake to health.

With thanks to The Woodbury Historical Society, Sister Doris, and Sister Teresita





EPA's Hudson River PCB Cleanup Review Under Fire from Environmental Groups

By Julie Brinkman

Environmental organizations are strongly criticizing the EPA's Final Third Five-Year Review of the Hudson River PCB Superfund cleanup. The EPA concluded that more data is needed to determine if the dredging efforts are meeting cleanup goals, despite evidence suggesting otherwise.

According to a report by the Friends of a Clean Hudson coalition, both fish and sediment PCB levels remain dangerously high and are not recovering at expected rates. Environmental groups argue that the EPA is ignoring its own data showing cancer-causing PCB levels remain significantly higher than anticipated after the dredging project.

The contamination stems from General Electric's 30-year dumping of PCBs into the Hudson River, creating one of America's largest Superfund sites. This pollution has affected a 200-mile stretch of the river for over 70 years, with persistent PCBs continuing to travel throughout the ecosystem.

Environmental justice concerns are particularly acute, as many low-income families continue to consume contaminated fish despite health advisories. Leaders from Scenic Hudson, Riverkeeper, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, and Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter have all expressed disappointment in the EPA's conclusions, pledging to continue advocacy efforts for a comprehensive cleanup that truly protects community health and the river ecosystem.

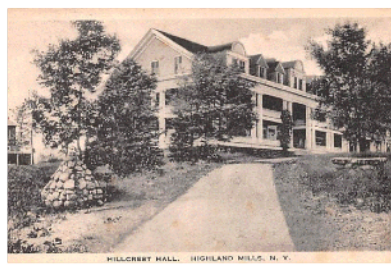
What are PCBs?

Polychlorinated biphenyl are man-made organic chemicals consisting of carbon, hydrogen and chlorine atoms that have been used in many industrial and commercial applications

Photos of Lake Cromwell



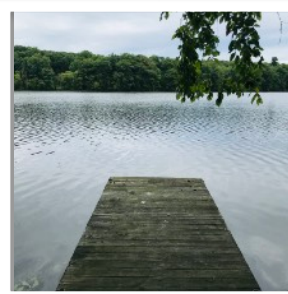
Rainbow over Cromwell Lake
Photo Credit: Paul Share



Hillcrest House
Photo Credit: Fishtamp's Collectables



Photo Credit: Steve Nashian



Invasive Water Chestnut
Photo Credit: Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy



The Lake House
Photo Credit: Woodbury Historical Society





Arbor Day Celebration Information

In partnership with Woodbury Climate Smart Task Force, join us for a gathering of friends and companions in mission for an afternoon to...

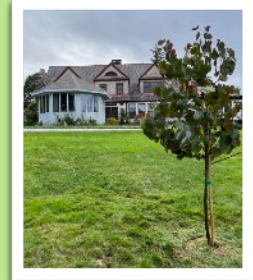
- ✳to welcome spring
- ✳to unite with our Mayor, Andrew Giacomazza, in his Arbor Day proclamation
- ✳to reunite with each other around finger food and drink
- ✳to bless the many new trees being planted AND
- ✳to bless a tree(s) from your own property

For this please bring a twig, fruit, or leaf from your own tree to "carry the blessing home".

When: Sunday, May 4, 2025 from 1:00-3:30pm

Where: 15 Bethany Drive Highland Mills, NY 10930

RSVP to: annewib2@crocker.com by April 25th with how many people will be attending



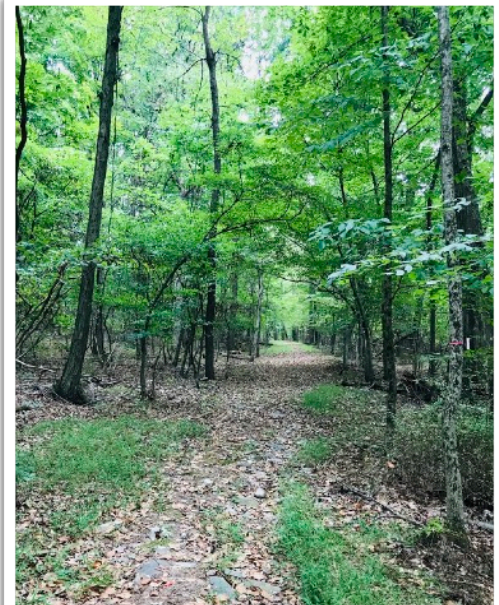
Newly Planted Redbud
Photo Credit: Sr. Teresita Morse

Raising Future Stewards: A Family Cleanup Becomes a Lesson in Life and Legacy

By Kayel Conklin

One weekend in March, as the morning frost lingered on brittle branches and the crisp air tugged at our coats, I took my two sons, Coleman and Clayton, into the heart of our local woods. With a black 55 gallon trash bag in hand and determination on their young faces, they stepped into the underbrush, ready to take on a challenge that too many of us overlook: cleaning up our community.

It wasn't glamorous work bending down to pick up weathered plastic bottles, unearthing old cans tangled in the roots of dormant shrubs but it was meaningful. That's what I wanted them to understand. We live in a world where convenience often trumps responsibility, where the debris of modern life piles up quietly in the corners of our shared spaces. As I watched my boys navigate the brambles and dead leaves, I realized this wasn't just about cleaning up litter, it was about planting the seeds of stewardship.



*Raising Stewards cont.*

Coleman, bundled in his bright red jacket, ventured deeper into the thicket, carefully balancing on uneven ground as he reached for a crushed soda can. Clayton, wearing a blue hoodie adorned with cheerful cartoon characters, stood nearby, eyeing the branches with a mix of curiosity and caution. They weren't just cleaning, they were learning.

Through this experience, they gained more than the satisfaction of a cleared path they learned about responsibility, teamwork, and respect for the natural world. They saw firsthand how one piece of trash could choke the life from a sapling or poison a curious bird. They learned that their actions, no matter how small, could have an impact.

It wasn't just the environment that stood to gain from this lesson it was their character. Patience grew as they untangled plastic from thorns; resilience strengthened as they faced the chilly air and the monotony of repetition and empathy blossomed as they considered the animals and plants affected by human carelessness.

Cleaning up our community isn't just about making things look better it's about showing the next generation that they have the power to create change. It's about teaching them that the world doesn't clean itself, and that the burden and the privilege of stewardship belongs to all of us.

As we walked back toward our house, the trash bag full and heavy in my hand, I glanced at my boys. Their cheeks were flushed from the cold, legs were weak from the journey, their small hands chapped but proud. They had made a difference not just for the woods, but for themselves. And as I watched them laugh and chase each other across the clearing, I knew that the seeds we had planted that day would continue to grow, shaping not only their relationship with nature but with the world around them.

In the end, this wasn't just a cleanup. It was a legacy passed down from parent to child, from earth to hand, from careless waste to conscious action.



Coleman and Clayton
Photo Credit: Kavel Conklin



Kids Corner: Plan your own community clean-up

How to plan your own community clean up day like Kayel:

1. **PICK A LOCATION:** Is there a local road that's covered in rubbish? Or a nearby beach just swimming in litter? Select a spot that really needs some extra attention.
2. **GET PERMISSION:** Share your plan with your family. They may have ideas for how you can go about organizing your efforts or getting the word out about your event. Share the info
3. **SAVE THE DATE:** Look at your family's calendar and find a free Saturday or Sunday within the next couple of months. You'll want to give yourself at least a few weeks to prepare and give notice to your neighbors. Don't forget to set a rain date in the event of bad weather.
4. **GET THE INFO OUT:** Put out signs or hang flyers with the date, location, and time of your cleanup around your neighborhood. Ask a parent to share the info on your neighborhood newsletter or on their social media page. Be sure to have volunteers RSVP to you (or a parent) with their e-mail address for quick correspondence later on.
5. **ASK FOR DONATIONS:** Go to nearby businesses and ask if they can donate to your cause. The hardware store may offer garbage bags, gloves, or tools; your local bakery may donate bagels and other snacks for the morning of the event. Your community waste-management organization may also offer supplies and other types of support.
6. **GIVE A HEADS-UP:** Once you have a list of volunteers, send a brief e-mail reminding them of the date and time with details on where to meet.
7. **SHARE YOUR WORK:** On cleanup day, be sure to take plenty of pictures (or have a friend snap some) to post online or include in an upcoming community newsletter. (Psst: Your school or teacher would probably love to see some pics too!)
8. **SHOW APPRECIATION:** When the last piece of trash is all picked up? Give a giant thanks to your cleaning crew. Send out a recap e-mail detailing things like how many bags of trash you hauled away and the number of volunteers you had. Then start planning your next cleanup event!

Copied from: <https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/nature/article/clean-it-up>

Looking for more? Join "The Great Global Clean Up" through earthday.org to join a global movement of people cleaning up their communities one piece of trash at a time!

Learn more here: <https://www.earthday.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/The-Great-Global-Cleanup-General-Info.pdf>



The Robins Have Arrived...

After flying 100 to 200 miles a day, the flock pulls into the home place, still energetic and super-aware. The robins always make me laugh out loud because they act just like my



family on arriving home after a significant time away! First, they look all around doing "the broad inspection." All seems basically OK. There have been no violent intrusions or destruction in the environment, essential trees still in place, lawns still broad, protective bushes on edges of woodland still abundant, the essential water sources still available – especially if those sometimes unreliable humans keep the bird baths full.

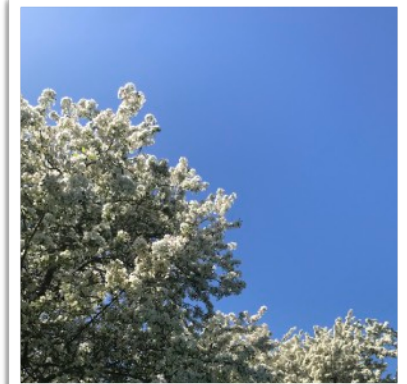
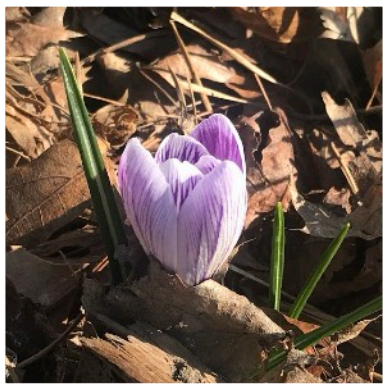


Next, they hop around doing “the pantry inventory”: worm population still plentiful, woods intact as a supermarket for insects – but significantly less insects than last year, berry bushes gearing up for the spring season. It is an important part of the robins’ work responsibility to assist their companions in the earth community by spreading seeds for the growth of new trees and bushes. They eat the berries and fruits and drop the seeds in new areas.



Then comes the big question for each female robin: “Is my special nesting place still waiting for me?” She has little time to settle this question. Nesting season begins in April so the robin couple must construct the nest immediately, beginning with a foundation of hardened mud (with water from the bird bath).

The arrival inventory completed, the flock relaxes and spreads out to settle back into the community’s warm weather routine. We all breathe a collective sigh of relief - the Spring season is officially opened!!! We are all regaled again with the male robin’s song which sounds like: Cheer-up! Cheer-up! Cheer-up! And heartened by glimpses of the female robin brooding on the nest.





***Laudato Si'* Quick Study - Chapter 6**

By Tom Brinkman

Pope Francis' conclusion of *Laudato Si'*, invites prayer more than thoughtful consideration. He lays out a spirituality of living as children of God in loving relationship with one another and all created things. Such a spirituality begins with conversion from a consumeristic mentality that looks to things for happiness. Francis sees the family as the prime locus for teaching a culture of life and "respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures." (212) He exhorts us to develop a spirituality that will change us from within rather than leaving care for creation as doctrines or information that is outside us.



His challenge is clear: "Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience." (217) He goes on to say that individual conversion and activity is insufficient. The complex situation requires communities of converted individuals to address it.

Elements of a spirituality leading to such conversion will include:

1. Gratitude for the gift of creation from the hand of a loving Creator
2. Awareness of our Interconnection with all creation "in a splendid universal communion" (220)
3. The eyes to see that "each creature reflects something of God" (221) and is therefore worthy of respect and care
4. A prayerful way of moving in this world such that we respond to the truth that "God created the world, writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore" (221)

Pope Francis turns mystical, recalling our Christian understanding that "the universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely." Thus, God can be found "in a leaf...in a dewdrop." His meditation on the Eucharist as "the living center of the universe" (236) begs to be contemplated. God comes to us as a fragment of creation, bread, and becomes our food. "Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concern for the environment, directing us to be stewards of creation." (236)



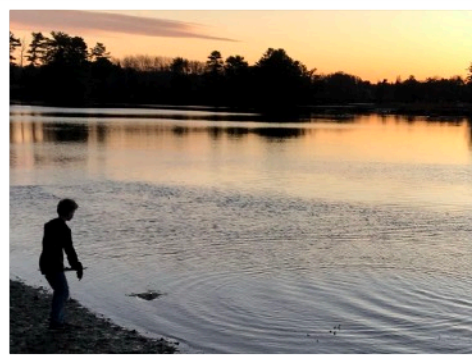
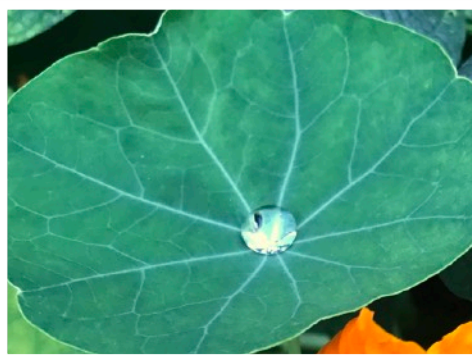
Laudato Si' cont.

We find in contemplating the mystery of the Trinity a similar mandate to care for creation. Since the Creator is Trinity, essentially relationship, all creation is imbued with this relationality. “Creatures tend towards God...and every living being...tend[s] toward other things. Thus one who knows our God, see that ‘creation is secretly interwoven relationship.’” (240) In a right ordered relationship with God, one sees their connection to and their interwoven relationship with all creation. May we open ourselves to such conversion by embracing our God who created us to be stewards of His creation.

New! *Laudato Si'* Reflection Questions - Chapter 6

1. What is the relationship between consumerism and selfishness?
2. Why does Pope Francis place the family as the center of bringing one into a spirituality of care for creation? What is your family doing to this end?
3. Pope Francis invites us to develop an attitude of “less is more.” How can you grow in this attitude in your own life?

Questions taken from: “Laudato Si’ On Care for Our Common Home” by Pope Francis, published by Our Sunday Visitor in 2015





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.



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