Pope Francis, in his recent encyclical *Laudato Si’*, has given our human community great insights into the water crisis, our responsibility toward people who are poor, and a more just value structure for water. His keen scientific acumen and global awareness presents a powerful piece about what it means to care for our “common home” and how water, sustainability, climate change, ecological and social issues are all deeply intertwined.

We cannot simply approach water as a commodity; instead, water must be appreciated as a good of the Earth that has life sustaining properties for all living things.

My love of water, and the corresponding fifteen years of research as an ethicist, began on a small coral atoll in the Pacific Ocean: Majuro, the capital of the Republic of the Marshall Islands. While living in Majuro as a Jesuit Volunteer all I could see for miles was ocean water, but we could not consume it. The Islanders were dependent on rain for their water supply. Alinglaplap, one of the small islands in the Marshall Islands where I spent two months, was completely cut off from the larger islands where necessary supplies could be purchased at stores. The islanders lived on a diet of fish and local foods. Accessible only by boat and a small plane making weekly trips, Alinglaplap had no running water which forced the Islanders to collect their rain water in large cement receptacles called catchments. While getting water from the catchment one day, I realized that the water level was very low and shared with a Marshallese friend my concern. She said to me in the local language, “Don’t worry, God will provide.” Of course, I did worry, as someone who has lived in an environment where I have never faced a water shortage or its corresponding consequences. The Marshallese, on the other hand, have lived through several water shortages, experienced the effects of dehydration frequently, and knew well the sickness encountered from drinking contaminated water. During my stay on Alinglaplap we were lucky to have enough rain to keep our water supply constant. The Marshallese people recognize water as a gift from God. They also were my first teachers in the sustainable uses of water.

My experiences in the Marshall Islands were followed by similar moments in places such as Nicaragua and Tanzania. I was often given water that was filled...
with insect larvae and dirt. While I felt uncomfortable drinking it, my companions who lived in the countries I visited did not. It is the recognition of this lack of water justice which propelled my studies and fueled my research. My experiences around the globe made it easier for me to believe, although not without great sadness and a desire to work for change, the world's water reality. The staggering numbers of those without access to clean water and adequate sanitation will only worsen as clean water sources are diminished and the demand for safe water grows. This is arguably the greatest “ecological-humanitarian crisis” that must “lay claim to the collective Christian conscience” since it is one of the most pressing issues we face.¹

In many parts of the world we are carrying on as if there is no water crisis, while in other locations people are risking their lives to secure clean water. In Mwanza, Tanzania, I remember seeing hundreds of Masai women walking miles along the dirt roads carrying up to 20 kilograms of water on their heads.² I never saw a man doing this; women are usually responsible for transporting water on their heads over long distances. The privilege I enjoy turning on a tap and having constant access to clean water comprises a small part of the 1,280 cubic meters of water used by each North American on average per year. In contrast, most Africans have access to only 186 cubic meters a year.³ Managing scarce quantities of water requires a unique skill that is absent from the context of water privilege. Those who are poor suffer the most from lack of access to water since they often do not live in a context where the taps run with clean water. Pope Francis reminds us that we “have a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water.”⁴ Those of us who live in places like Chicago are water rich, and can address this “social debt” by raising awareness around the water crisis.

Another part the problem is how we value water. Pope Francis states, “Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market.”⁵ However, the market can’t account for the human right to water. Water is also required by ecosystems to sustain life on this planet, a resource that should be viewed as part of the Earth and not a good regulated by the market, because market regulation lets the rich outbid the poor.⁶ Once it is commodified and priced according to the market, water becomes one of many “things” a consumer can buy. The natural world cannot “buy” water, yet the need for water in nature is equally compelling as that of human beings. Marginalized populations who live on as little as one dollar a day cannot afford to pay the market price for water when it is privatized. Vandana Shiva, a human rights activist and scholar, claims that when the social and ecological value of a resource is recognized there is a greater chance for “equitable and sustainable use.”⁷ Part of our responsibility, then, involves affirming the intrinsic value of water as a good of the Earth, a gift from God, and not a tradable commodity.

As people of faith, as global citizens, and as people of hope we need to address the water crisis with our communities and help usher in a more appropriate value system for water.
the developed world, but also in developing countries which possess it in abundance. Ultimately, the commodity view of water falsely allows human beings to think that they own water. The longer we work under the assumption that we have the power to control water, the more devastating the impact of this view becomes.

As people of faith, as global citizens, and as people of hope we need to address the water crisis with our communities and help usher in a more appropriate value system for water. Simple steps are possible once we raise awareness around the water crisis. As Christians, we participate in the baptismal rite. What an ideal sacrament to help shift our view of water and connect it more fully to its biblical meaning as a gift from God. In the Catholic tradition, the rite calls for water that is “pure and clean.” Perhaps this is a moment to remind people that “pure and clean” water is not accessible to all and that part of our baptismal call involves working to ensure all people have access to water, one of the most fundamental needs for survival. Church communities and universities can make small changes that lead to more sustainable water practices. While I worked at Loyola University Chicago, I was privileged to know and work alongside students who successfully campaigned to remove the sale of bottled water from campus. Eliminating bottled water encouraged the community to find more sustainable ways to transport and consume water. Currently I work at Dominican University, where the community is also committed to finding ways to care for and conserve water in our everyday environment. Recently, we have recycled an old cistern from the 1920’s that was dormant. Once cleaned and re-furbished it is used to catch rain water which is then used to irrigate our soccer field. Not only is there a cost savings in this project; it is estimated that it saves roughly 4-6 million gallons of water a year. These are the success stories that need to be shared and celebrated so that others may follow steps like these.

As more of us engage the topic of water and sustainable practices, more people may evaluate how they use water. Understanding individual water footprints and encouraging institutions to know how much water they consume will help us find new value systems for water. Small acts, such as turning off the tap while brushing one’s teeth, are the type of actions that can lead to larger changes in time. Encouraging the use of filtration systems in offices and homes instead of purchasing bottled water can cash out in large movements away from the waste and cost that goes into bottled water. Theologian Sallie McFague addresses this idea of seemingly simple acts of change which have great potential. “Our small acts of resistance, of saying no to more, of refusing to go with the crowd, will not save the world, but they can help us see the material needs of others as our spiritual task.” Her idea demonstrates how small acts which justly value water are the starting point for truly honoring the water needs of the global community.

As people of faith, we can address this human rights and ecological tragedy not only in our churches, but also through our rights as citizens to vote and organize for change. Only in this way will societies begin to value water for its intrinsic worth. Pope Francis reminds us that we should always have hope and it is never too late to “redirect our steps.” As we “redirect our steps,” turn off our taps, and share more sustainable water stories with our communities, we are ensuring clean water for our children and grandchildren and the ecosystems that will hopefully outlive us all.

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Water Sustainability and Access for All

by Avery Kelly

We are living in a time of unprecedented prosperity. In terms of overall GDP, the United States is one of the richest countries in the history of the world. At the same time, in Detroit, Michigan nearly 3,000 households per week have had their water shut off since the spring of 2014 due to inability to pay water tariffs that have spiked 120 percent in the past decade. Detroit has become host to a grueling cycle of no payment, no water for many marginalized communities of color, leaving those who cannot pay—including elderly people and families with young children—living an almost incomprehensible reality in a country with so much wealth and so much water.

On a global level, although the United Nations (UN) recognizes the human right to water and sanitation as a universal and inalienable right, in practice, it remains unmet for billions. At least 1.8 billion people drink fecally contaminated water, and 2.5 billion remain without access to basic sanitation. This means that globally, more people have access to mobile phones than to a clean and safe toilet.

Added to this crisis of disparity in access to water and sanitation is the rapid depletion of our world’s watersheds. Recent NASA data shows that one-third of the world’s largest groundwater basins are in distress. This means that they are being depleted at astonishing rates while receiving little to no recharge, effectively interrupting the water cycle that nature uses to regenerate watersheds and sustain us. Distressed groundwater basins mean drought, water scarcity, and environmental damage.

Worse yet, these water crises are not isolated. Without water sustainability and universal access, sustainable development for all will remain out of reach. Water justice is directly related to the empowerment of women and girls, eradication of waterborne diseases, universal education, peace building, and the ability to effectively address climate change, among other things.

To get to some of the roots of this problem, we must recognize that these realities are not naturally occurring disasters outside of our control; rather they are concerted symptoms of a deeper crisis of inequality and injustice produced by systemic economic policies and political realities. Water scarcity and uneven access to water—much like poverty—are, in fact, human-made, and the first step on the road to overcoming
these crises is to unravel the systems we have put in place that cause them.

The structural barriers to water sustainability and access to water include:

- a neoliberal economic model that prioritizes economic growth and an unbridled free market over social protection, inclusion, and redistribution of wealth;
- the conceptualization of water as a commodity instead of a common good;
- threats to the realization of the human right to water and sanitation in trade agreements;
- the increasing influence of financial institutions and markets in control of access to water; and
- privatization of essential services, which diminishes transparency and community participation in decision making.

Solving the water crisis requires us to identify systemic causes and to work collectively to erect new economic and political systems that are based on the principles of equality and justice.

Confronting these barriers requires dismantling the global push for economic growth at all costs, including the unsustainable patterns of production and consumption implicit to this model of development. At the most basic level, this means listening to people at the frontlines of the global water crisis. Based on these grassroots experiences, we will need to reign in neoliberal economic policies that are either irrelevant to or direct obstacles for combating poverty and inequality, like rampant privatization schemes and public-private partnerships for the provision of essential services. Concretely, this would involve acknowledging mistakes that have been made in the past (i.e. austerity measures locked in after economic crashes that exacerbate inequalities in water access and disproportionately burden women and girls) and intentionally changing the course of development (i.e. using lessons learned from failed water privatization schemes and looking at best practices of public ownership of water).

Although massive, the structural barriers to water sustainability and access to water for all that we collectively face can be destabilized by intentional global action. One opportunity to challenge the course of our current development model is to insist upon a just, rights-based, and critical interpretation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs.) The 17 SDGs are part of a larger agenda for global sustainable development that Heads of State adopted at the United Nations Summit in September of this year. Although ambitious in number and scope, without intentionally prioritizing the needs of people and planet over “trickle down” development from concentrated profit, the new global agenda risks further entrenching the systems that have gotten us to the water crises we face today. In particular, SDG 6 on water and sanitation must be interpreted using a human rights lens and implemented with a hierarchy of water use that prioritizes people’s needs over other interests. Another opportunity to go against the development grain furthering unsustainable water practices is to ring fence essential services, including water and sanitation, from private sector participation and public-private partnerships in the implementation of the SDGs. We know the devastating impacts that privatization of water services has had around the world and should look to the hundreds of recent cases of water “remunicipalization,” in which communities effectively take back ownership and control of water from corporate hands, as testament to this.

A proactive approach to combating the global water crises and moving towards water sustainability and access to water for all can take place locally. This
The world is facing a severe and growing water crisis.

by Maude Barlow

In May 2013, some 500 renowned scientists brought together in Bonn at the invitation of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, sent out a warning that our collective abuse of water has caused the planet to enter “a new geologic age”—a “planetary transformation” akin to the retreat of the glaciers more than 11,000 years ago. Already they said, a majority of the world’s population lives within 30 miles of water sources that are badly impaired or running out.

Around 900 experts from around the world were asked to assess the world’s biggest global risks in advance of the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in January 2015. They said that in terms of its potential impact, the water crisis is our greatest threat. Another global study warns that by 2030, demand for water will outstrip supply by 40%. Lack of access to clean water is already by far the greatest killer of children.

So how are world leaders and global institutions dealing with this threat? Very badly and with no plan. This is because the water crisis has been misdiagnosed.

While recognized as real, the water crisis is usually seen as a symptom of climate change, itself caused by excessive greenhouse gas emissions. Droughts are almost always reported as the result of climate change. While no doubt greenhouse gas emission-driven climate change does have an important and negative impact on watersheds, warming temperatures and speeding up evaporation, there is another story that needs to be told.

Massive water diversion for flood irrigation and the over-exploitation of groundwater has left large areas of the world without water. The destruction of the Aral Sea in Asia and Lake Chad in West Africa—once the 4th and 6th largest lakes in the world respectively—was not caused by climate change. It was a result of relentless extraction for commodity exports.

The drought crisis in California is not climate change per se, but the massive engineering of the state’s water supplies to provide for a handful of powerful farmers. A huge amount of the state’s water is exported as “virtual water” embedded in export commodities. The Ogallala Aquifer in the Midwestern U.S. is not being depleted by climate change, but from unremitting extraction, mostly for corn ethanol.
The notion that water can become a negotiating tool for cooperation and peace rather than the cause of conflict and war must be explored and the path to water justice must be a central tenet of this plan.

Removing water from water-retentive landscapes leaves behind parched lands and desertification. Removing vegetation from water-retentive landscapes changes the water patterns forever. The current crisis in Brazil—once a water rich country—is largely due to the destruction of the rainforest. Take down the forests and the hydrologic cycle is negatively affected.

This misdiagnosis not only causes us to miss the mark in coming up with the right solutions to the water crisis, it has led world leaders, elected officials and international institutions to wrap the water crisis in with their research and deliberations on climate change. If water is mentioned at all, it is as one more victim of climate change, almost always solely attributed to the burning of fossil fuels. The fact that destroying water-retentive landscapes is in and of itself a major cause of climate change is not part of the analysis or discussion in climate change circles.

As a consequence, flawed as it is, there is a very serious process to deal with climate change, including an annual climate summit every December and multiple preparatory meetings in between. But there is no corresponding process to deal with the global water crisis.

The UN General Assembly has not specifically included water in its agenda. The 1992 Rio Earth Summit targeted water, climate change, biodiversity and desertification for action; all but water have since been addressed with a convention and a plan. There is no coordinated response to the world’s growing water crisis, even as it threatens life on earth, either inside the United Nations or among nations. Any attempt at answers is local, sporadic and underfunded.

Water must be addressed as an issue in and of itself. There is an urgent need to create a “Marshall Plan” for water.

Key components would include watershed protection, conservation and restoration; national and community programs to replenish water-retentive landscapes; watershed sharing and governance; models of food and energy production that do not harm water; the prevention of eutrophication; consideration of the impact on water of trade agreements; and the need for strong local, national and international commitment to put water protection at the heart of all laws and policies.

The notion that water can become a negotiating tool for cooperation and peace rather than the cause of conflict and war must be explored and the path to water justice must be a central tenet of this plan.

Five years ago this past July, the United Nations General Assembly adopted an historic resolution recognizing that water and sanitation are fundamental human rights. It is urgent that the United Nations and world leaders now take the next step toward a water-secure future and commit to creating a Marshal Plan for Water that has its own convention, plan of action, and the resources needed to meet the greatest threat of our time.

“The Marshall Plan was a U.S. Sponsored program from April 1948-December 1951 designed to rehabilitate the economies of 17 western and southern European countries in order to create stable conditions in which democratic institutions could survive (Encyclopedia Britannica).

Maude Barlow chairs the boards of Ottawa-based Council of Canadians and Washington-based Food and Water Watch. She served as Senior Advisor on Water to the UN General Assembly. Her latest book is Blue Future, Protecting Water for People and the Planet Forever.
How much water do you eat?

by Brooke Barton

From farm to factory, producing food is the most water intensive business on earth. The gallon of milk you buy in the store, for example, requires more than 500 gallons of water to produce—from the water used to grow the dairy cow’s feed, to the water used to sterilize equipment at the milk processing plant. And, as with any food item, the vast majority of that water is used in the dairy producer’s agricultural supply chain, for growing crops and raising the dairy cows.

Fully 70 percent of the world’s freshwater is in fact used to irrigate crops and raise livestock, yet clean water supplies are rapidly vanishing across the globe. Recent NASA satellite data1 show that the world’s largest underground water reserves, or aquifers, are being pumped at alarming rates. One-third of these groundwater basins—which sustain the world’s food supply—are in serious distress. Closer to home, a recent study by the University of Illinois2 found that over pumping of the United States’ three most tapped aquifers could impact both domestic food security and international markets.

At the same time, surface water pollution is on the rise, further shrinking available clean water resources. Climate change and exploding population growth will worsen this trend of diminishing freshwater resources.

Global food companies today face extraordinary risks from these twin challenges of water scarcity and water pollution. Diminishing water resources could disrupt agricultural supply chains, increase financial risk, and trigger social unrest as food prices rise. Some of these scenarios are already unfolding, but many companies in the food sector—as well as much of the general public—still behave as though water is cheap and limitless. In order to protect our freshwater supply, it’s crucial to understand the five water risks that are affecting the agricultural supply chain: competition for water, weak regulation, inadequate water infrastructure, water pollution, and climate change.

The Five Water Risks Impacting the Food Sector

Competition for water is increasing steadily across all regions of the globe as the world’s population is on track to reach nine billion by 2050. More people are consuming water-intensive foods, such as meat, as incomes rise. Increased demand could cause agricultural water consumption to rise by 20 percent over the coming decades. Yet already 1.2 billion people live in water stressed regions around the world, as agricultural and urban water users compete for scarce supplies in drought-stricken regions, such as California. Across agricultural supply chains, competition for water puts a premium on supply that can lead to rationing and steep water rate increases.

Weak policy frameworks, institutional capacity, and political will to manage water demands and water quality contribute further financial risk for food companies. More water due to a variety of toxins and pollutants from agricultural and storm water runoff.

Climate change will exacerbate all of the other factors. More extreme rainfall in some regions and intensified droughts in others will fundamentally alter where crops can be grown, while diminishing overall global agricultural productivity. Due to this unstable future, commodity prices will become even more volatile. As strained water resources become harder to manage, the struggle for procuring safe water will increase.

While some food companies are beginning to work towards a more sustainable

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Competition for water is increasing steadily across all regions of the globe as the world’s population is on track to reach nine billion by 2050.
future, most have a long way to go according to Ceres’ recent report, *Feeding Ourselves Thirsty*, which benchmarks food companies on their overall management of water risks. Many companies are also leaving their shareholders in the dark about how big a financial risk these water trends pose.

**Investor Action**

Ceres, a nonprofit sustainability advocacy organization that mobilizes business and investor leadership on water scarcity, climate change and other sustainability challenges, is working with investors to engage food companies on their water risks. This August, more than 60 North American and European investors, managing a collective $2.6 trillion in assets, joined with Ceres, the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility and the United Nations-supported Principles for Responsible Investment to send letters to executives at 15 major food and beverage companies asking for more transparency.

Companies receiving letters were identified as poor performers on water management issues, and included Archer Daniels Midland Co. (ADM), Monster Beverage (MNST), Tyson Foods (TSN) and Kraft Heinz Co. (KHC).

Mary Beth Gallagher, acting director of the Tri-State Coalition for Responsible Investment, explained why her organization joined the effort, “Pollution from farm runoff poses environmental, reputational and financial risk to food companies, especially those in the meat industry. We’d like to see exposed companies outline specific practices for improving water quality for their facilities, their contract facilities and their suppliers to reduce the impacts of their operations on the right to water in nearby communities.”

Thankfully, when shareholders like Gallagher speak, company management tends to listen. Already, 10 companies have responded to the investor letter, with the majority committing to provide more information about their exposure to water risks and plans for addressing them.

While the investors sending the letters are buoyed by this response, they view commitment to disclosure as the first step toward broader dialogue with these companies over their water risk management. Investors are also focusing on a few food sector companies for deeper engagement through the shareholder resolution process, including, Dean Foods, Wendy’s and Tyson’s Foods.

Ultimately shareholders are seeking to help businesses prioritize corporate water stewardship, which indicates to shareholders that they’re taking freshwater risks seriously. For instance, after years of engagement with investors and members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), this year Bunge joined the UN Global Compact’s CEO Water Mandate, an international group of companies committed to implementing a strategic framework for water management and reporting. The company has also committed to a variety of sustainability initiatives related to sourcing and water oversight within their supply chain.

Individuals can take action to move food companies toward greater responsibility of our water resources, particularly if they own mutual funds or stock in food companies. Many socially responsible funds now screen for water risks. Individual investors can ask their fund managers how they’re assessing whether the food companies in their portfolios are managing water risks, and if they incorporate their analyses into their buy and sell decisions.

Protecting our precious freshwater resources will require collaboration among all stakeholders—individuals, communities, farmers, companies and government. And it begins with the recognition that water is the lifeblood for us all.

▲ Brooke Barton leads Ceres’ water program, directing the organization’s research as well as corporate and investor engagement on the risks and opportunities related to growing water scarcity. Brooke also works with Ceres members in the food and beverage sector.
Women, Girls, and the Sacred Right to Water

by Chloe Schwabe

In rural Tanzania, women leave the village together to go collect water. It is an opportunity to be in fellowship with each other. But water is not always easy to come by. More than a quarter of women in Sub-Saharan Africa spend a half hour to a quarter of their day on a single trip to collect water, and there is no guarantee that the water is clean and safe to use.¹

Although the United Nations Convention on the End of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) calls for women to have access to adequate water and sanitation, low-income women in developing countries are still sacrificing school, hours working, and even their health to gather a daily supply.

Water and Women’s Health

The toll of carrying water on their heads in rural areas can cause long-term pain and conditions for women related to the spine, neck, and hips. Additionally, due to the long distances that a woman has to travel, and the small amount of water she can manage, she may not get sufficient water for her own health, leading to challenges with menstruation, childbirth, and just ensuring everyday proper hydration.

Once a woman collects the water, it still may be contaminated. Open defecation continues to persist in Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, which pollutes surface water sources and can spread intestinal conditions caused by bacteria.²

Pesticides used in agriculture or chemicals used in extractive industries such as cyanide in gold mining can also cause water contamination. Exposures to these toxins can cause skin rashes, reproductive harm, affect menstrual cycles, infant mortality, end up in the breastmilk of nursing mothers, and even death depending on the level of exposure. This is a growing concern as countries in the “majority world” increasingly depend on extractive industries to support their GDP.

In both the urban and rural realities, a lack of sanitation facilities can be particularly challenging for women. Unsafe bathroom conditions or open defecation can be an issue of dignity as women may become more vulnerable to sexual assault. Finding bathrooms can also be a challenge during menstruation if there are not adequate conditions for her to change or access sanitary napkins. While difficult to track because of the very private nature of menstruation, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF’s Joint Monitoring Program on Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (JMP) estimates that 500 million women worldwide lack adequate facilities for menstrual hygiene management.³ Programs do exist that respond to this sensitive problem. The international non-governmental organization, WaterAid, empowers and trains women to educate other women and girls in their community about good hygiene.

Amidst the challenges, it is important to recognize how far we have come in bringing more water access to the majority world. According to the JMP:

In 1990

76% of the population used improved drinking water sources
1.3 billion people lacked improved drinking water sources
346 million people used surface water
54% of the population used improved sanitation facilities
Nearly half of the global population lacked improved sanitation

In 2015

91% of the population uses improved drinking water sources
663 million people lack improved drinking water sources
158 million people use surface water
68% of the population uses improved sanitation facilities
1 in 3 people lack improved sanitation⁴
Women at a village pond in Matlab, Bangladesh washing utensils and vegetables. The woman on the right is putting a sari filter onto a water-collecting pot (or kalash) to filter water for drinking.

Economic challenges and opportunities

Being the primary water-gatherers can keep girls out of school and women from performing other tasks or having a job to provide income for the family. This can keep them trapped in poverty. When communities gained easy access to water, girls’ attendance in school increased by 11 percent.5

In rural areas, women make up the majority of smallholder farmers. As climate change depletes water resources and increases desertification, it may become even harder for women to irrigate their crops, which will affect their livelihood as a farmer. To address this challenge and to avoid dependence on patented, genetically-modified drought-resistant seeds, some women are turning to agroecology as a sustainable farming practice that relies on local inputs and respect for the ecosystem where the farm or garden is situated.

Hope for the future

Over the years, missioners and development organizations alike have learned that in order for new water and sanitation infrastructure projects to succeed, the community needs to be invested in the process from the beginning. Organizations, such as WaterAid, are training women to repair irrigation systems when problems arise. These solutions are creating economic opportunities for women and improving the right to water and nutritious food.

Story: Eti Ahkbar—Dhaka, Bangladesh

Eti’s life was incredibly stressful. Each day began with the challenge of finding enough water for her family’s survival. Without proper toilets, human waste stagnated in open drains and ditches. A nearby river is polluted with industrial and human waste. When desperate, Eti and her neighbors turned to the river for bathing and laundry.

In this environment swimming in disease, Eti’s children were frequently ill. A significant portion of her hard-earned income was spent on medicine to treat water and sanitation-related illnesses. She hoped her children could be educated, but spending so much for water and medicine meant she couldn’t afford school fees. Eti’s family was trapped in a cycle of extreme poverty.

Eti’s life is very different today. Her slum community recently completed the construction of water systems and toilets in her neighborhood and at the local school. She and her neighbors now have ample supplies of clean water for drinking, bathing, cooking, laundry, and hand washing. And they have private, sanitary toilets. They are healthier. Their environment is cleaner and odor-free. They are living with dignity.

Eti and her husband are able to save money now. What they previously spent treating illnesses is being redirected to other needs, like school fees, books, and uniforms. Eti’s dream is coming true—her children are being educated, enabling them to pursue opportunities she and her husband never had.

Eti and her community were trained in the operation and maintenance of their project. This is why Water1st projects last. Communities are self-sufficient and empowered.

Now organized, they have the structure in place to tackle their next set of priorities. Eti and her neighbors decided they wanted a cleaner living environment—they organized a trash collection service and successfully lobbied the government to build concrete walkways in place of muddy foot paths. Together, they are moving out of extreme poverty, the catalyst being a well-organized, community-owned water project.

Thanks to Water1st supporters, we have completed 1,426 projects in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Honduras—transforming the lives of 134,632 people. The impact is enormous. Clean water and toilet projects break the cycle of extreme poverty.
Raising our voice to reduce

CLIMATE CHANGE

by Nicholas Mele

T

wenty years ago, the United Na-
tions began drafting a multilat-
eral treaty to curb greenhouse gas
emissions. What began with high hopes
for an effective response to human-caused
climate change seems to have bogged
down. In the run up to the next round of
talks in Paris, expectations are rising that
effective measures to curb climate change
can be negotiated. Why has progress been
so slow on this growing global problem?

As a general rule, the more parties
to a negotiation and the more impor-
tant the issue being discussed, the more
complex and longer the process is. Cli-
mate change directly affects every na-
tion on earth, so it is extremely diffi  cult
to reach agreement on the stated goal
of limiting climate change to an average
rise of two degrees Celsius.

Climate change affects rainfall, both
its timing and the amount of rain that
falls on any particular region; the green-
house eff ect and related human activity
is changing the chemical makeup of the
world’s oceans while causing them to rise
as glacier and polar ice melts. Marine
food stocks are stressed because of these
changes. For many countries, this means
the climate change convention must take
into account these and other consequenc-
es of whatever measures it contains.

1. Changes in rainfall timing and
volumes will cause economic disrup-
tions as formerly “wet” regions be-
come “dry” and farmers shift to irri-
gation crops suited to drier climates.
The reverse will happen in currently dry
regions that become “wet.” More severe
hurricanes, typhoons and winter storms
are already causing economic disrup-
tions and these will worsen. There could
well be conflicts over water rights as
once water-rich regions become arid.

2. How much of a change in sea
levels can the global community ac-
cept? Low-lying nations like Bangla-
desh are already facing internal move-
ment of peoples; several Pacific Island
nations have been purchasing land in
areas above sea-level, in anticipation of
a future move from their slowly drown-
ing atolls. If there is no consensus or no
ratifi cation of an international treaty
soon, more nations will face internal mi-
grations and, quite likely, conflicts over
such movements of people.

3. As the Arctic ice cap shrinks, north-
ern nations are scrambling to exploit
the resources revealed in newly-opened
stretches of sea, including fossil fuel de-
posits. Formerly ice-covered land masses
are opening up for new uses, and displace-
ing the Inuit and other peoples who have
long dwelt in the far north. There has not
been as much media coverage of interna-
tional rivalries in Antarctica, but there, too,
the developed nations are staking claims
on hidden mineral and other resources.

Nations are not the only players in these
negotiations. The business community
is also concerned about climate change;
certainly, fossil fuel companies want to
continue extracting and selling fossil fuels,
and beverage companies are buying up
rights to potable water around the world,
but other companies, like those engaged in
agriculture and fi nance want to minimize
disruptions caused by climate change. Ci-
vil society groups, environmental agencies
and religious institutions have an interest
in seeing an eff ective climate change treaty
fi nalized and ratifi ed as quickly as possible.

World public opinion is waking up to the
need to deal with climate change before
the wells run dry and the crops wither.

President Obama hopes for measures
at the Paris Climate Conference that limit
warming to three degrees Celsius. Al-
though this will not reach the UN goal, it
is defi nite progress if achieved. Citizens,
particularly in developed countries, must
raise our voices to urge a serious coopera-
tive global eff ort to reduce future climate
changes. Now is the time to urge our
heads of state to reduce the impact of
the changes that are already occurring.

Nick Mele is a retired Senior Foreign
Service officer who writes on foreign
affairs, nonviolence and other justice
issues for a variety of publications. He is
currently a Washington state promoter
for Campaign Nonviolence.
The Death of Life

by Paul Peterhans

“Let me say this before rain becomes a utility that they can plan and distribute for money. By ‘they’ I mean the people who cannot understand that rain is a festival, who do not appreciate its gratuity, who think that what has no price has no value, that what cannot be sold is not real, so that the only way to make something actual is to place it on the market. The time will come when they will sell you even your rain. At the moment it is still free, and I am in it. I celebrate its gratuity and its meaninglessness.”

—Thomas Merton, Rain and the Rhinoceros

Storyteller. Interconnected. Silence. These three are central, powerful spiritual values and practices. Without them, water and all creation, including humans, are mere commodities, whose value can only be found rising and falling on “the market.”

Water is sacred. It exists nearly everywhere in the universe but, as far as we know, reveals itself as a Trinitarian element only here on earth – from one oxygen and two hydrogen molecules to the three forms it takes, the only substance in nature that can be in either solid, liquid and gaseous forms. Water is our source, healer and sustainer of life – indeed of all life forms. We are water. We are literally walking rivers and watersheds. Water as Silence, as Storyteller, as Interconnectedness, reveals the dialectic dance of the Trinitarian Life at the heart of the Universe—Silence (Emptiness) of Ultimate Mystery; Storytelling of Creation (Word), and Interconnectedness (Depth) of Spirit.

Consider the fact that in addition to outrageous acts of polluting our waterways daily and its wasteful overconsumption, global watersheds are either melting, drastically reducing and/or drying up and collapsing. Soon, the source of life will become the source of the death of life.

The death of life. Meditate on that in the silent, storytelling, interconnectedness of all things. And then, ask yourself as Sean McDonagh does in To Care for the Earth, “If the natural water systems are poisoned… and symbolize death… how can it then be an effective symbol for the transformative power of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus?”

At the heart of Pope Francis’ Encyclical Laudato Si’ is not just a call to an ecological conversion as some will have us think, but a radical personal transformation along with a restructuring of global culture(s) such that all of life is seen in its proper nature—as sacred. “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face” (Laudato Si’ 233).

We aren’t encouraged to simply discover and implement “solutions” to our current climate crises. We are called to reorient the whole of our lives—personal and social—so as to create a culture of care. One cannot strategize one’s way to this kind of culture. One must awaken to it. And this awakening into a new consciousness and culture enables us to rediscover our deepest nature.

Rain and Water are festivals, calling us to nurture and identify all as Sacred. How do you celebrate the rain festival? Storyteller. Interconnected. Silence. In the silence of the night, I listen to the rain kissing the metal roof of the house, gathering together in a stream to then rush along the wide-mouth gutters to a pipe and a filter that then fills the two 3,000 gallon rain cisterns in the yard, telling me the story of life—a life that is gratuitous, interconnected and sacred; a life that feeds our gardens; that preserves mountain waters for other species; that keeps my family and friends alive. It is a festival that tells me I am free…I am in it—that I am totally dependent on this miraculous festival, this rain, this Sacred Water. Excited with gratitude, I smile with contentment.

Paul Peterhans teaches theology at Seattle Preparatory School. He is the founder of Contemplative Outreach NW. Mary de Rosas is his partner and they have two grown sons, Conor and Devin. Strategizing toward climate change mitigation, they have redesigned their home to be net-zero energy.
Women's Justice Circles

New Book!
New book from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development features the IPJC Women’s Justice Circles and tells the story of the strengths, tenacity, and triumphs of immigrantLatinas who were Circle members.

Bilingual Community Dialogues
Bilingual Community Dialogues to gather information on social justice issues that affect the Latino community and to brainstorm practical next steps to bring about positive change are being organized in Tacoma, Tukwila, Olympia, Everett & Yakima.

Fall Justice Circles
Fall Justice Circles are starting in Sedro Woolley, Port Townsend, Tacoma, Spokane and Billings, MT! If you are interested in joining or starting a Justice Circle call Giselle at (206) 223-1138.

NEW!

New Laudauto Sí Supplement to accompany our Climate Change: Our Call to Conversion booklets

Updated Advocacy Tool on Immigration

Northwest Coalition for Responsible Investment

NWCRI Members Welcome 2030 SDGS
On September 25, 2015, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGS). These 17 far-reaching and transformative Goals aim to end poverty, promote prosperity and well-being for all, protect the environment and address climate change by 2030.

One of NWCRI members’ priorities is SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

As responsible shareholders we were signatories to the letters to executives at 15 major food and beverage companies (see p.9) and we participate in shareholder dialogues on water with Archer Daniels Midland, Bunge, Campbell Soup, Coca-Cola, Hershey, PepsiCo and Tyson Foods.

For seven years NWCRI and ICCR shareholder have worked with Bunge, a leading agribusiness and food company, to adopt a strategic framework for water management and reporting. Progress made includes Bunge establishing a Sustainability Committee of the Board and joining the CEO Water Mandate.

Read NWCRI Annual Report 2015
Young Adult Justice Cafés
Community Building-Justice-Spirituality

Justice Cafés create spaces where young adults can build community, act for justice and deepen spirituality. Around the world, over 50 Justice Café groups are meeting monthly to discuss and act on social justice issues in their communities. Email Elizabeth at emurphy@ipjc.org to find a Justice Café near you, or start your own!

Upcoming Topics:
November — Incarceration & Restorative Justice
January — Creating Conversations for Social Change
February — Globalization: Truth & Consequences
March — Water
April — Act for Water Justice!

Catholic Advocacy Day 2016
Catholic Advocacy Day is early this year!
Registration for Catholic Advocacy Day begins November 9 this year! Advocacy Day will be held February 8th in Olympia, WA.

Donations
In honor of: Sisters of the Holy Names Jubilarians, Janice Hollkup, OP, Joseph Harvey & Richard Horn, Jocie Rhea Chism, SNJM, Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary
In memory of: Mary Ann Quinlan, Thomas Kessing, CSJP, Marie Coughlin

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Catholic Advocacy Day is sponsored by:
Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center · Washington State Catholic Conference · Archdiocese of Seattle
Catholic Community Services/Catholic Housing Services of Western WA · Pierce County Deanery · St. Vincent de Paul

AGENDA
8:45–9:15: Registration to Meet with Legislators
9:15–9:45: Legislative Briefings
9:45–10:15: Mass
10:15–11:30: Legislative Appointment Preparation
12:30: Legislative Appointments
12:30–2:00: Lunch — On your own
2:00–3:00: Follow Pope Francis, talk with your representatives
3:00–4:00: AGENDA Chartered bus for registered participants!
4:00–5:00: Free Will Offering

Online registration begins November 9, 2015 at ipjc.org
Please register by January 18, 2016
For registration questions, call 206.223.1138 or email catholicadvocacy16@ipjc.org

CATHOLIC ADVOCACY DAY 2016
FEBRUARY 8TH
9:00AM TO 3:00PM · OLYMPIA, WA

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A MATTER OF SPIRIT
This Issue: Water

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Leader: Let’s take a few moments of quiet to reflect on:
What story of life does the rain tell you?
(pause)
Leader: I invite anyone who wishes to share with us what story of life the rain tells you.

Closing Prayer
All: Water falls from the sky! Water flows from high in the mountains! Water runs deep in Earth! Miraculously, water comes to us and sustains all life! Amen!

The entire material universe speaks of God’s love... boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.—Pope Francis, Laudato Si’ 84