

Uniting for Our Sacred Waters

**CONVERSATION AND ACTION
AROUND THE SACREDNESS OF WATER**

**A PASTORAL LETTER BY
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*With joy you will draw water from the
wells of salvation.
Isaiah 12:3*



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Contents

4

Introduction

6

Part I

Water Is God's Gift to Us

10

Part II

Our Changing Waters

12

Part III

A "New" Solidarity

14

Part IV

Pray for Water's Healing and Miraculous Aid

16

Part V

Sister Water Reminds Us What Is Holy

17

Part VI

Reflection, Conversations, and Action

20

Appendix I

Deepening Spiritual Connections with Sister Water—Prayers and Practices

24

Appendix II

Days Throughout the Year to Celebrate Water in Special Ways

27

Appendix III

Questions for Reflection, Discussion, Action, and Advocacy

29

Appendix IV

Readings and Resources

Introduction

My dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is June 24, 2015, and I am at Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo. It is one of my first pastoral visits as the newly installed Archbishop of Santa Fe, and it is the feast day of the Nativity of John the Baptist. After Mass in the beautiful mission church, I join the members of the Pueblo for a procession to the banks of the Rio Grande, where I bless buckets of water drawn from the beautiful and iconic river. We walk back to the Pueblo where the summer buffalo dances take place, and I bless the dancers, the people, and the homes with holy water.

Over the years, Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo bore different names. The community refers to their home as the "village of the dew-bedecked corn structure." Franciscan missionaries, who arrived in 1598, named it Saint John the Baptist Pueblo. What is apparent to me about this remarkable village community is the sacredness of water. I could imagine generations of the Pueblo with the water, and also John the Baptist, standing knee-deep in the Rio Grande, baptizing those called to our Catholic faith. This precious day, and the beginning of my time in New Mexico, made a great impression upon me.



It has been said that we see the beginnings of the Church in the flow of water and blood from the side of Christ. Our entrance into that Church begins as the waters of baptism flow over our heads, and we are reborn. Baptism is the beginning and the sustaining sacrament for Catholics, and water is both the sacred medium and symbol. Throughout the liturgical year, the Church uses water to remind us of our baptisms and our unity with Jesus Christ in his suffering, death, and resurrection.

I relish the sprinkling rite during the Easter season as I walk through the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, blessing the congregation with water, a reminder of their baptism and spiritual journey in life. It is wonderful, also, to bless homes, cars, religious articles, and on October 4, people's pets with sacred water. Each time I walk into the cathedral or a church in our beloved archdiocese, I bless myself with the water from the baptismal font. During Mass, I pour water into the wine and wash my fingers with water before the offertory prayer. When I celebrate funerals, I bless the coffin and sprinkle the earth at the grave site. There is holy water in a container in my car, at the rectory where I live, and in my office. I am surrounded by and blessed with sacred water in my ministry and life.

Indeed, water flows throughout the days of our lives, touching our bodies and our souls with the healing, renewing, refreshing, and life-giving grace of God whose love is like a torrent gushing into the inner recesses of our lives. We see water at the beginning of our lives as the amniotic sac breaks, and water and baby soon emerge. On average, 60 percent of our bodies are comprised of water. Since coming to the high desert of New Mexico, I am constantly reminded of the need to drink plenty of water throughout the day. I have been told the average human being can only go for about three to four days without water. Our Indigenous and Hispanic communities speak of Water as Life. No wonder Leonardo da Vinci said water is the driving force of all nature!

Sacred Scripture grasps the importance of water, referring to it approximately 722 times. One of its most beautiful references comes from the Book of Revelation, where we read, "Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing for the throne of God and of the Lamb..." (Revelation 22:1). What a marvelous understanding of how God gifts us with water so that we might have life. And how poignant that Jesus Christ, in whom and through whom and for whom all things exist, would cry out from the cross, "I thirst" (John 19:28). The echo of Christ's lament reverberates throughout the Body of Christ, that is, the Church. We thirst for peace between nations, justice for

immigrants, homes for the unhoused, food for the hungry, freedom for political prisoners, release for people with an addiction, safety for victims of violent crime, security for the economically poor, and life for all creation. Indeed, humanity is suffering from a moral drought, and how we cherish, distribute, and protect water on the planet is symptomatic of that drought and even part of it.

In Exodus 17:6, Moses confronts the people's stubbornness. They were hardheaded and did not appreciate the many gifts God had given them. And so, he touched the hard rock with his staff, and water flowed out. We need God to touch the hardness of our heads with his generous staff, thus enabling a torrent of grace to flow into our thirsty lives. We are the thirsty Body of Christ who echo Jesus' thirst from the cross. We thirst for the living waters that sustain life in our souls. But as Saint Thomas Aquinas reminds us, grace builds on nature, and nature, including our bodies, needs water to survive and to thrive. Sadly, the precious gift of water is not always available, nor properly distributed, especially to the economically poor.

Desalination plants are bombed in Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates, thus threatening devastation and even death to millions who live in the desert. Palestinians in Gaza suffer from the effects of war, resulting in little to no access to clean water. As the Midwest is inundated with snow, the Southwest and the West are parched. The Rio Grande gets smaller with each passing year, while those in fire zones in New Mexico fear floods and the destructive force of water. So, water, or the lack thereof, brings life and death, beginnings and endings. We must treasure this precious resource and channel it into life. Thus, the importance of reflecting on water in our lives and how we cherish it, use it, protect it, save it, and nurture it. It cannot be overestimated.

In this 800th anniversary year of the death of Saint Francis, we do well to ponder the late Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* in which he reminds us that water is a fundamental human right, a precious resource indispensable for life, and a key indicator of environmental injustice. I hope my pastoral letter on water will deepen in all of us an appreciation for the gift of water, a gift that symbolizes the living

water that Jesus promised to the Samaritan woman at the well and the same water that flowed over us when we were baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.



Part I:

Water Is Gods Gift to Us

More than 800 years ago, Saint Francis of Assisi, the Patron Saint of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, wrote The Canticle of the Creatures. Today, it inspires us to be in kinship with Sister Mother Earth and Sister Water:

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.

Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars in heaven, You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather, through which You give sustenance to Your

creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and pure.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape. Woe to those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.¹

¹ Francis of Assisi. "The Canticle of the Creatures" (1225). From Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol. I: The Saint, Edited by Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., J.A. Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Conv., and William J. Short, O.F.M. New York: New City Press, 1999, pp. 113-114.

These ancient words remind us that through God's gift of water, we are always in his holy presence. Sister Water sustains all living creatures, and she in persistence carves canyons and erodes mountains, offering us diverse landscapes to live upon, and filling God's world with sustenance and hope. Each of us needs water for life, refreshment, cleansing — and joy.



Let us renew our love and kinship with Sister Water, especially as our common waters suffer from climate change, overconsumption, pollution, greed, competition, and conflict.

In the teaching encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*, Pope Francis wrote that The Canticum of the Creatures "reminds us that Our Common Home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."²

Reflecting upon climate change and social justice, Pope Francis also wrote:

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air, and in all forms of life.³

Reading the Word in the Book of Genesis, some believed God invited humans to have "dominion" over nature. On the

² Pope Francis. (2015). Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

³ Ibid.

contrary, our “dominion” over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.⁴

In 2020, Pope Francis called us to consider what we leave for our children and grandchildren: “Let us safeguard the heritage that God has entrusted to us so that future generations may enjoy it.”⁵

During his September 9, 2025 Angelus reflection, Pope Leo XIV spoke of Jesus’ parable of the dishonest steward and said: “We are not the masters of our lives or the goods we enjoy. Everything has been given to us as a gift by the Lord who has entrusted this endowment to our care, our freedom, and our responsibility.” He added: “One day, we’ll be called to give an account of how we have managed ourselves, our possessions, and the Earth’s resources before both God and humankind, before society, and especially before those who come after us.”⁶

And there is a good way forward, said Pope Leo XIV: “We can recognize everything we have as a gift from God to be managed and used as an instrument for sharing, to create networks of friendship and solidarity, to work for the common good, and to build a world that is more just, equitable, and fraternal.”⁷

As people of faith, we know that care for Sister Water is inseparable from the teachings of Christ.

In the Holy Saturday Vigil at the end of Lent, we immerse ourselves in the holy waters of baptism, and we are again made new as we are joined with Christ’s death and resurrection. Water cleanses us of our sins and restores us to new life in

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Pope Francis. (September 16, 2020). Remarks at the General Audience. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200916_udienza-generale.html

⁶ Pope Leo XIV. (September 25, 2015). “How Are You Using the Gifts God Gave You?”

⁷ Ibid.

Christ.

Throughout his lifetime, Jesus revealed how water speaks to spiritual truth. When Jesus meets the Samaritan woman at the well in the midday heat, for instance, he offers the living waters of the Spirit so that no one shall thirst again (John 4:7–30). At a wedding celebration in Cana, Jesus revealed himself as God’s presence by turning water into wine (John 2:1–11). During Passover, Jesus washed the dusty feet of the disciples (John 13:1–20).



He walked on the Sea of Galilee (Mark 6:45–52) and after his resurrection, he fed his disciples on the beach, reassured them and invited them to eat.

We bless ourselves with water when entering and leaving our churches. Just as we share and celebrate the word of Christ, we share and celebrate the sacredness of water. Together, let us reflect on our kinship with our waters and how we are responsible for protecting, conserving, and restoring them.

Part II:

Our Changing Waters

Across the Archdiocese of Santa Fe — and across the state — our precious wetlands, streams, and rivers are thirsting for the waters they once knew. The Lower Rio Grande in southern New Mexico is dry for much of the year, and now the Middle Rio Grande through Albuquerque commonly dries during the summer.

“It’s so visual, when rivers through the population centers dry

up,” says Paula Garcia, executive director of the New Mexico Acequia Association. “But for those of us who live in the tributaries and the upper areas, our rivers have been drying since the 1990s.”

Garcia has watched the rains and snows change in her lifetime: “Our communities are under tremendous stress to hold on to this life-giver that we need for everybody's well-being, for all living beings, for the rivers to exist and flow, but also for all living things, trees, fish, and people to grow food,” she says.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis wrote that “Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods.” And he called it one of the “principal challenges facing humanity,” especially for the economically poor and those who are in agriculture, forestry, and fishing.⁸

We see the “grave implications” already in New Mexico, where catastrophic wildfires harm people and their homes; destroy forests and wildlife habitat; sever people’s traditional connections to lands, waters, and sacred plants; and are followed by devastating floods.

Signs of climate change are obvious across our state — from dust storms and cracked croplands, to dying forests and thirsty orchards. Warming and drying harm aquatic species and all wildlife that rely upon steady seasons, available food and water, and safe habitat.

Warming and aridification also weary people’s hearts and hopes for the future, and intensify competition and conflict among countries, states, communities, and neighbors.

The trend toward increased aridity will continue, says Dr. David Gutzler, professor emeritus at the University of New Mexico’s

⁸ Pope Francis. (2015). Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*.

Department of Earth and Planetary Sciences. And the changing water cycle will affect everyone, as well as our relationship with the natural world.

“Our ability to cope with a smaller water supply without making significant changes to the way we use water is diminishing year by year,” Gutzler says. “We will soon be faced with some very difficult choices.”

Heeding these warnings, we must urge leaders to make moral decisions that protect Sister Water and all the people and creatures who rely upon safe and accessible water.

As Pope Francis wrote In *Laudato Si'* more than 10 years ago:

Greater scarcity of water will lead to an increase in the cost of food and the various products which depend on its use. Some studies warn that an acute water shortage may occur within a few decades unless urgent action is taken. The environmental repercussions could affect billions of people; it is also conceivable that the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century.⁹

Such challenges require our urgent attention, our stewardship, and our prayers, especially as they strain people’s care for one another and for nature. We must resist treating our neighbors — and nature — as enemies. And as a society, we must make moral choices that equitably protect people, waters, lands, and wildlife — and future generations.

In kinship with our waters, with care for Our Common Home, and with love for our neighbors, I invite people to wonder: What is Sister Water saying to you in God’s presence?



⁹ Ibid.

Part III: *A “New” Solidarity*

When we pay attention, we see how our waters are suffering. Streams and rivers have less water, and groundwater supplies are shrinking.

The United Nations recently reported that rivers and aquifers around the world are losing the ability to return to what we once considered “normal” conditions. According to the report, this “water bankruptcy” is putting rivers, lakes, wetlands, groundwater, and glaciers under “unprecedented pressure” and these trends signal “growing stress” and a “structural imbalance between water demand and available resources.”¹⁰

Here in New Mexico, groundwater supplies are declining across the state.¹¹ Our groundwater stores could have been a “savings account” to help people through hot, dry times. Instead, we spent those waters believing they could be squandered without repercussions. Rather than caring for God’s gift, we wasted it. Now, we must act quickly to protect those underground waters for future generations.

Meanwhile, in places like Clovis, Alamogordo, and Santa Fe, the U.S. military’s use of Aqueous Film Forming Foam has contaminated precious groundwater with Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also called “forever chemicals” because they persist in the environment and are nearly impossible to eliminate. In Albuquerque, Kirtland Air Force Base has contaminated the city’s groundwater with jet

¹⁰ UNU-INWEH Report: Madani, K. (2026). Global Water Bankruptcy: Living Beyond Our Hydrological Means in the Post-Crisis Era. United Nations University Institute for Water, Environment and Health (UNU-INWEH), Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada. DOI: 10.53328/INR26KAM001

¹¹ New Mexico Groundwater Alliance. (2026). New Mexico 360 Groundwater Report. https://200b6dc9-7ba6-44ca-90eb-cb4b0d90f095.filesusr.com/ugd/712924_25e5b7c1c57a4a468f975b9fa5de92e1.pdf

fuel.

For eight decades, the state's nuclear weapons laboratories have polluted waters with hazardous and radioactive materials. In many cases, we are just beginning to understand the extent of these dangerous pollutants. It was just recently revealed that activities at Los Alamos National Laboratories created a hexavalent chromium plume that has spread to the waters beneath the Pueblo of San Ildefonso.



Los Alamos pollution has already reached the Rio Grande, where radioactive and toxic waste lies in the sediment beneath Cochiti Reservoir. Contamination from legacy, current, and proposed nuclear weapons manufacturing will spread for decades and even centuries.

Historically, the Archdiocese of Santa Fe has been part of a peace initiative, and we rejuvenated that work in 2022 with my pastoral letter, "Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament." In that letter, I wrote about how nuclear weapons rob the poorest among us. They also contaminate the waters that are God's gift to all of us.¹²

It is undeniable that the ecological crisis is a moral issue. During his Celebration of the World Day of Peace in 1990, Pope Saint John Paul II proclaimed peace with God the Creator and peace with all his creation: "Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the

¹² Most Reverend John C. Wester. (2022). "Living in the Light of Christ's Peace: A Conversation Toward Nuclear Disarmament." https://archdiosf.org/documents/2022/1/220111_ABW_Pastoral_Letter_LivingintheLightofChristsPeace_Official_Reduced.pdf

goods of the Earth as we have in the past.”¹³

He also called for a “new solidarity” — a unity across all faiths and peoples — and reminded Christians to carry out their moral responsibility to protect God’s gifts of creation: “Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith. As a result, they are conscious of a vast field of ecumenical and interreligious cooperation opening up before them.”¹⁴

Meanwhile, here in New Mexico, governments and corporations rush to privatize waters, excavate new mines, or build data centers and new gas-fired power plants. Many industries, including the fossil fuel industry, already pollute fresh water, making it unsafe for people and animals.

Before political leaders and decision-makers approve new projects or industries, they must carefully consider moral choices: How much water will be used? From whom will water be taken? How will Sister Water be harmed?

Even the closest neighbors may disagree over water supplies. But water is for everyone — and it is unifying and healing. All people, all God’s creatures, and all future generations should feel the sustenance, refreshment, and joy of water.

I invite you to consider how New Mexico’s waters are threatened — and to act in new solidarity with others to protect our shared and sacred waters, to protect one another and our wildlife and ecosystems, and to protect future generations.

¹³ Pope Saint John Paul II. (January 1, 1990). “Message Of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of The World Day of Peace.” https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html

¹⁴ Ibid.

Part IV:

Pray for Water's Healing and Miraculous Aid

Having clean, abundant water requires hard work and sacrifice. The same is true to protect our waters from overconsumption, pollution, commodification, and privatization. As children of God, we must not hoard or commandeer water.

Across the western United States, as in many places around the world, powerful people, corporations, and state interests act as if it is natural for communities and neighbors to fight with one another over water, rather than to cooperate and care for one another, wildlife, and waters.

Just as Jesus came to Saint John the Baptist, then emerged from the waters of the River Jordan to see the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descend upon him, we can ask our waters to reveal God's wisdom and grace to us. Together, we pray for water's healing and miraculous aid — and for one another.

Phoebe Suina, a hydrologist and member of the Pueblo of Cochiti, was raised to live in balance with water. "It is everything: the wholeness and whole cycle of water, from the mist to the clouds, to the rain to the snow," she says. "It is running on the ground, soaking into the ground, flowing underground, and coming up through springs. It is the rain, the condensation, our breath. It is every single phase of water."



Through songs and actions, Suina was taught to respect the entire cycle of water: "As Pueblo people, we've been here since time immemorial, and it is not

for us to use the resources and use the land. It is to live in balance and steward,” Suina says. “Even in my Catholic tradition, there is that core value of respect — of one another, and how we take care of one another, including the resources.”

Pope Francis reminded us that we cannot look at nature from the outside. As God’s children and as part of God’s creation, we are an integral part of nature, which we are called to cherish, guard, and protect as kin:

As many spiritual masters have taught, the heavens, the earth, the sea, and every creature possess this iconic capacity, this mystical capacity to bring us back to the Creator and to communion with creation. For example, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, at the end of his Spiritual Exercises, invites us to carry out ‘Contemplation to attain love,’ that is, to consider how God looks at his creatures and to rejoice with them; to discover God’s presence in his creatures and, with freedom and grace, to love and care for them. ¹⁵

As Saint Ignatius of Loyola invited us to carry out “Contemplation to attain love,” consider how nature herself needs water; how our streams, rivers, and wetlands deserve their own waters; and how ecosystems suffer when there is not enough water for all of God’s creatures. I invite you to become more graceful kin with nature, water, and all of God’s creatures.



¹⁵ Pope Francis. (September 16, 2020). Remarks at the General Audience. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200916_udienza-generale.html

Part V:

Sister Water Reminds Us What is Holy

God is communal and relational, and his gift of Water brings us together. Water is an oasis for the good of all, not just the few, and God's teachings remind us to share, as well as to steward.

As Pope Francis wrote in *Laudato Si'*, climate change, or climate disruption, affects the most vulnerable.¹⁶ Acting in new solidarity with one another, we make sure everyone — Indigenous, *nuevomexicano*, immigrant, rural, and urban people — has access to God's gifts of water. With renewed solidarity, we can be in better kinship with our precious waters, especially in a warmer, drier world.

"There are a lot of catastrophes happening around the world, and there are a lot of people who have forgotten how to take care of the land and the water, and how to respect the land and the water," says Talavi Cook, who is from the Pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh and is also of Hopi and Diné descent. "When we are in a drought, we need to pray. We need to pray hard, and we have to call the rain — and that must come with intention and sacrifice."

In today's world of conveniences and quick expectations, some people have forgotten that sacrifice is necessary. "You're not going to have a good harvest every year," she says, "and you

¹⁶ Pope Francis. (2015). Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encidica-laudato-si.html

have to figure out how to survive off that.”

We have been in a place of forgetfulness. But Sister Water wakes us, reminding us what is important and what is holy. Sister Water is within us and around us all the time. Let us listen to her more closely.

When God gives us a gift, we trust in his gifts and we share those gifts. We do not hoard or commandeer his gifts or lend support and strength to those who do.

I invite you to consider how we come together in grace around God’s gift of water, and how we protect our waters through unity, sharing, and sacrifice.



Part VI:

Reflection, Conversations, and Action

Since time immemorial, Indigenous people in New Mexico have cared for our precious waters, learning to live within the desert landscape. For hundreds of years, *nuevomexicanos* have blessed the waters of the acequias and prayed for water and the lands they nourish.

Today, we remember and learn from one another. We learn from the past and act creatively in a new solidarity as we face climate change to protect God’s gift of water from overconsumption, pollution, and greed.

We urge our political leaders and decision-makers to act with moral courage so that *nuevomexicano*, Indigenous,

traditional, and rural communities have equitable and just water solutions.

Pope Francis called for us to know that “we are all either saved together, or no one is saved,” and we heed his exhortation to “dream big, to rethink our priorities — what we value, what we want, what we seek — and to commit to act in our daily life on what we have dreamed of.”¹⁷

He believed that “God asks us to dare to create something new,” and he called for economies that allow everyone access to the “fruits of creation.”¹⁸ Political dialogue must integrate those who are often excluded or vulnerable, so that people have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, he said: “We need to slow down, take stock and design better ways of living together on this earth.”¹⁹

Climate change, or climate disruption, is already causing hardship and harm in New Mexico. And its impact will continue to intensify, especially as our state and other regions of the world emit massive amounts of greenhouse gases through oil and gas development, war and conflict, industrial agriculture, and other industries.

Water is an intimate part of us, and we are each connected to every drop of water within our watersheds. Let us talk about our love of water and our ways of protecting water with our beloved family, friends, and community members, and within our congregations and our social circles. Let us each learn about climate change and its impact on water supplies and water quality — and engage in fact-



¹⁷ Pope Francis. (2020). Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti, On Fraternity and Social Friendship. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.pdf

¹⁸ Pope Francis, (November 26, 2020). “A Crisis Reveals What Is in Our Hearts” in The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/26/opinion/pope-francis-covid.html>

¹⁹ Austen Ivereigh. (2014). The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope. Allen & Unwin Academic.

based conversations that are clear-eyed and compassionate toward our neighbors, upstream and downstream.

Water is God's gift to us. It's finite. Less clean water is available to us now. It's painful to consider how we failed to steward God's gift. But we know better now. We do better now.

To honor our connection to one another and with God's gift of water, each of us can pay attention, pray, and act in our personal, spiritual, and political lives.

Meanwhile, polluters must be held accountable and required to clean up the contamination they have created and spread. New pollution must be prevented before it occurs.

Our elected leaders must act with moral courage to protect our waters, communities, nature, and future generations. Constituents can educate elected officials about the importance of climate action and water protection and then shore up their moral courage and hold them accountable.

Pope Francis once lamented that in today's world, "the sense of belonging to a single human family is fading, and the dream of working together for justice and peace seems an outdated utopia." He called for us to cast off the "cool, comfortable, and globalized indifference, born of deep disillusionment concealed behind a deceptive illusion: thinking that we are all-powerful, while failing to realize that we are all in the same boat."²⁰

I invite you to consider what water means to you and to envision a better future for our sacred waters — and everyone who shares in them as God's gift. Together in unity, we can protect our waters and one another. We can do this, and with the God of peace with us, we can do this soon.

²⁰ Pope Francis. (2020). Encyclical Letter Fratelli Tutti, On Fraternity and Social Friendship. https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_encidica-fratelli-tutti.pdf

*Praised be You, my Lord, through
Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and
precious and pure.*

*St. Francis of Assisi,
"The Cantic of the Creatures"*



Appendix I

Deepening Spiritual Connections With Sister Water: Prayers and Practices

Throughout the ages, Christians have known that each moment is holy. In each moment, God whispers to us in action. In contemporary society, we sometimes lose track of this sensibility. But here are prayers and practices to rekindle a deep connection of love with God, creation, water, and one another.

For his part, Saint Francis showed us a different way to relate to creation. He listened, he saw, and he felt the world and creatures around him. This is not something we generally do in a fast-paced world. But let us spend a moment listening to the plants and to the animals — and to Sister Water. What is God saying through them?

Prayers

Prayer for the day's first drink of water

O God, thank you for these first drops of water today. After a long night, I am reminded that life is most precious, and water is one of God's sacred gifts. Like Sister Water, God walks with me this day.

Blessing at the holy water fount, or at home

As I bless myself, water reminds me of my baptism. Water reminds me that each place is holy, each moment is holy, and that I am united with all people, elements, and creation. May these drops of water on my forehead, heart, and hands carry a blessing into the world.

Prayer while washing dishes

"Rather let justice surge like waters, and righteousness like an unfailing stream" (Amos 5:24).

Let me be mindful that all my actions with water are holy, and even mundane tasks like washing dishes can be prayers for Sister Water. Just as we come together each meal in peace and gratitude, when we clean up afterward, we can call for "justice to surge like waters" for all those in need. Sister Water cleans and heals so that I can eat again in safety at a table with loved ones. All are loved in our world and long for home, peace, and freedom from war and poverty. Each drop I touch is a blessing and intention.

Prayer in times of drought

Loving Creator, you give us the gift of life – water.

El Agua es Vida.

Like the scriptural woman at the well at midday, we are hot and thirsty.

Together, we are concerned that our rios y ojitos, our rivers and springs, are dry.

Our corn, beans, squash, and all plants are as thirsty as we are.

Help us through this dry time.

Help us be wise and to use water with care and tenderness.

Help us know how to work to preserve and protect our Sister Water.

Help us work and care for Sister Water into the future so all children will know water as life.

Prayer for water and climate change

Creator of all, whose spirit moved over the waters at the dawn of creation, we cry out to you in this time of climate crisis.

Forgive us for the destruction of our oceans, the drying of our rivers, and the melting of our glaciers.

We ask for your mercy upon all life that depends on these waters — from the smallest creature to the vast coral reefs.

Grant us, O Lord, the courage to change our ways, to protect your precious gift of water, and to ensure that all your people have

clean water to drink.

Inspire us to live in balance with the earth, that future generations may know the beauty and life-giving power of your creation.

Prayer for Earth

From Pope Francis's encyclical, *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.

You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.

Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

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

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

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature

as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

Prayer for San Ysidro Labrador (credit: Ted Trujillo)

A mi Glorioso Padre Eterno, humildemente te doy gracias por la vida de tu servidor, San Isidro Labrador, patrón de los labradores. El cual que por los siglos nos ha mantenido, vuestro sembrado libre de langostas y temblores. Podemos a tu servidor, San Ysidro Labrador, que por tu sudor y trabajo con que fuites fatigado,

liberta vuestro sembrado del ladrón acostumbrado de no tener temor al Criador de esta tierra. Liberta vuestro sembrado de la tempestad, de la sequía y del granizo que daña vuestro labor, le pedimos por el amor del Gran Señor. San Ysidro Labrador, cortesano del Señor, hasta el año venidero, nos despedimos de ti. Adios mi querido santo, San Ysidro Labrador, te dejamos en la compañía del Gran Señor.

Practices

For families with children

- Consider this line from The Cantic of the Creatures: “Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful and humble and precious and pure.”
 - Ask: Why is water a sister? How is Sister Water a sacred gift? How do we treat a sister? How is water part of your life? Name ways water is taken for granted. Let every sip of water during your day be a reminder to say thank you.
 - Pray: Thank you, Sister Water, for giving life to everything on Earth, including me. I am grateful for water in each moment of this day and for water that flows through my body. May I listen to you, Sister Water, and care for you.
- During the Last Supper, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17). Pope Francis adopted this example of humility and spiritual cleansing when he washed the feet of inmates, and Pope Leo recently washed the feet of 12 priests from the Diocese of Rome. Ritual hand washing and bathing can be a spiritual cleanser in our lives. Even washing little hands of children can be a teaching and holy moment.

Corporal works of mercy, and sharing drink with the thirsty

“And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple...” (Matthew 10:42).

Because water is God's gift to us, we each have a moral and ethical responsibility to ensure everyone has clean water, including humans, plants, and animals. When you give water to your child, a neighbor, a friend, or someone in need — in a glass or through a cup of tea — remember you are engaged in the works of mercy. Sharing God's gift of water also means caring for clean water. Pray in gratitude for water and ask God's wisdom in advocating for clean water. Ask your friends, family, and community how they care for Sister Water and share your intentions to deepen your care of creation with them.

Water carries the vibrations and messages of life to renew and heal

"Then the Lord will guide you always and satisfy your thirst in parched places, will give strength to your bones. And you shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters never fail" (Isaiah 58:11).

Consider: What deep sorrow or fear do I have? Place a bowl of water on a table. Offer a prayer asking for guidance or healing or recite the line from Isaiah 58:11. In silence, listen, and be in the holy moment. Bless yourself with water. Bless the world around you with water. Leave this bowl in a special place to offer more prayers for renewal, wisdom, and healing.

Humans are part of the natural world and are made of water created by God

"He (she) is like a tree planted near streams of water, that yields its fruit in season; its leaves never wither; whatever he does prospers" (Psalm 1:3).

Walk by a river, pond, stream, or other water body. Notice in gratitude the plants and trees growing there. Take to heart the messages of Saint Francis and Saint Clare that everything is brother and sister. What is your relationship with a tree or plant? Thank God for these wonderful plants. Spend a moment listening to the plants. What is God saying to you through them? How does the tree or plant nurture you? How can you nurture this plant or

tree, a gift of God? What fruits can you share together?

Contemplating the needs of the creatures who are brothers and sisters

"As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1).

In a climate changed world, we all suffer from aridity, smoke, fire, dust, and thirst — and so do all of God's creatures. Imagine and observe the impacts of water shortages, extreme temperatures, and fire on all of God's creatures. How does the deer feel longing for streams of water? Does the deer long for love and God? Ask how it feels to long for streams of water and for God. Allow yourself to feel the longing for God. Allow yourself to feel your connection to a deer or other creature. Pray a prayer of love for your new awareness of interconnection and the expansion of knowing the immensity of the family of God. Listen for guidance in how to act in love to care for Sister Mother Earth in this time of climate chaos.



Appendix II

Days Throughout the Year to Celebrate Water in Special Ways

During our busy days, it's good to remember and create space and time to enter into sacred wonder, awe, and commitment and to care for Sister Water and Our Common Home. Here are suggestions for a few sacred times of the year.

December - Advent

The scripture readings of Advent are filled with images of water, Earth, harmony, and balance. Reflect upon Isaiah 10:1-10 and the

message of this pastoral.

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a branch will bear fruit...
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea...

How can you integrate your Advent journey with the call for gratitude for water, Earth, and the invitation of Jesus coming anew?

Reflect upon Isaiah 43:18-19: "Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert." How can you act with care and love for Sister Water and the Earth?

February 1: Feast Day of Saint Brigid of Kildare

Saint Brigid is a Celtic Saint who loved the earth, and she inspires us to see each action as important and holy. On Saint Brigid's Day, people in Ireland visit holy wells, collecting water for blessings of plants and people. As we use water in our daily activities, we can say, "May my use of water this day be a blessing for green plants." We can also say: "May my offering of water to drink or in cooking be a blessing to myself, my family, and my neighbors as a prayer of healing and peace in a world longing for love."

Lent

The purpose of Lent is to prepare to renew our baptismal promises and prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ.

The season of Lent is a holy invitation to walk with Jesus in new ways. We celebrate Holy Week and Easter season as a renewal time of life within community and with all of creation. Marty Haugen's "Song Over the Waters" is one beautiful expression of the baptismal rites and during Holy Week and Easter: "God, you have moved upon the waters, you have sung in the rush of wind

and flame; and in your love, you have called us sons and daughters, make us people of the water and your name.”

During the blessing of baptismal water, the Easter candle is dipped into water, symbolizing the sanctification of water for the renewal of baptismal vows. If possible, take some holy water to your home as a reminder that you are light and water to bless others and our world.

Consider: How might this pastoral bring new insights and sacred action into my life — and the lives of my community during Lent and the Easter season?

May 15: Feast Day of San Isidro and Santa Maria

San Isidro and Santa Maria are patrons of farmers. Traditionally on this day, acequias and fields are blessed. During drought, people pray to Santa Maria for the blessing of rain. Join in a blessing of a river or acequia if you live near one. Place petals of flowers or leaves upon the water celebrating the goodness and beauty of all of God’s creation. Look for local and regional San Isidro Day celebrations you can join or support.

May 15: Prayer to San Isidro Labrador

Señor y Dios Nuestro, te damos las más infinitas gracias por las maravillas que has creado, poniendo a nuestra disposición el universo entero. Haz que responsablemente saquemos de la tierra el pan de cada día, y a ejemplo de San Isidro Labrador, cumplamos fielmente con nuestros deberes.

Te rogamos, que al igual que permitiste a tu siervo Isidro, hacer brotar agua por los campos; hagas que llueva en nuestros campos para que nuestras cosechas crezcan abundantemente y de esta manera podamos obtener un sustento digno.

Ayúdanos a implantar la justicia en el mundo, de modo que todos los pueblos puedan disponer de lo necesario para su alimento y su formación humana.

June 24: Birth of St. John the Baptist

The Feast of Saint John the Baptist is celebrated worldwide to honor his role baptizing Jesus. In New Mexico, it is traditional to

visit your local river, spring, or other water body to offer a blessing and bless yourself with the water. The patron saint of the Pueblo of Ohkay Owingeh is Saint John the Baptist — and like all pueblos and tribes, they celebrate, pray for, and care for waters in their unique cultural and spiritual ways.

Prayer for the gift of baptism

God, thank you for the precious gift of baptism, that we can publicly declare our love and passion for you. We ask for your goodness and blessings to be poured out. We pray that you work deeply within our hearts and souls to renew and refresh them each day. Come guide our footsteps, give us hope and vision for the future. Today, the past is gone. We stand free and whole, loved and forgiven within the kin of God. Cover and protect us and encircle us with promises and fill our hearts with joy.

August 11: Feast Day of Saint Clare

“What you hold may you always hold, what you do may you always do and never abandon.” Saint Clare is noted for her commitment to simple living and fasting on only bread and water, which were holy nourishment for her and her sisters. Together with Saint Francis, they are our Franciscan saints. As you pray The Canticle of the Creatures or The Canticle of Creation, reflect upon how you can care for creation and for our waters.

October 4: Feast Day of Saint Francis

“I have done what is mine to do. May Christ teach you what is yours.” Saint Francis is the patron of ecology. On his feast day, animals are often blessed with holy water. Ask yourself what Christ might be teaching you to do in this critical moment to care for Sister Water and Sister Mother Earth. You can pray The Canticle of Creation or The Canticle of the Creatures.



Appendix III

Questions for Reflection, Discussion, Action, and Advocacy

We are each called to demonstrate our care for creation by taking care of our waters. These questions can help you consider your physical and spiritual relationship with water and how you can take action for Sister Water.

- Where does your water come from? What route does it follow from its headwaters or aquifer to your tap, field, orchard, congregation, or business?
- What threat does your watershed face? Are there groups you can engage with to address concerns?
- How much water does your home, business, or congregation use?
- How might your home, business, or congregation use less water, or use water more sustainably?
- Does your parish or community hold specific ceremonies or prayers for waters? Consider participating in, revitalizing, or creating these ceremonies and prayers.
- Consider meeting in a small group to read and reflect on the pastoral. Guidance for study, conversation, and action can be found on the Archdiocese of Santa Fe's website archdiosf.org/water

Questions adopted from Earthkeepers360.org:

- What simple, everyday choices can you make to "cherish what remains" of the earth?
- How might environmental harm reflect deeper issues about how we define "values" as a society?
- How might your faith community model a more integrated approach to morality and care for creation?
- How does time outdoors shape your gratitude, humility, or perspective? When have you felt your spirit "wither" from being disconnected from nature?

- What would it look like to treat a river as sacred sister rather than as a resource? What rivers, lakes, or waterways have shaped your life or memories? What would it mean to lose them?
- What “origins” have we forgotten, spiritually, culturally, or environmentally that would change how we treat water today?
- Who in your community is most affected when water is polluted, restricted, or threatened, and how can you stand with them?
- Where in nature do you feel most restored, and what does that place awaken in you?
- Is there a place that is sacred to your community and worthy of protection? Why is it important to protect places essential to diverse cultures now more than ever?
- How can we find common ground with different cultures while protecting common ground and landscapes across New Mexico?

When meeting with civic leaders or speaking at public hearings, you can represent the ethical and moral voice. You can reference scripture, Catholic social teaching, and documents like *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*. Other resources include Catholic Rural Life's guide, “Water: A Sacramental Commons for All” (catholicrurallife.org/water-a-sacramental-commons-for-all). The principles presented there can help people of goodwill reach solutions that demonstrate justice and nurture peace.

There are many other ways to advocate for Sister Water in New Mexico, including:

- Give the pastoral letter to civic leaders for moral and ethical grounding in caring for water.
- Learn who your local, state, and federal civic leaders are. Build relationships with them by attending town halls, writing or calling, and participating in public hearings, meetings, and comment periods.
- Learn about local water issues and provide leaders with ethical and moral perspectives that offer them wisdom for decision making.
- Join a group that already actively works to protect our waters.
- Learn the facts about climate change and other issues related to water in New Mexico, including oil and gas, mining, water

planning, and data centers. Learn from and listen to others in your community. Engage in public hearings and public comment periods.

- Learn about the institutions that manage the water in your life. Are you a member of an acequia or a mutual domestic? Does your county have a water committee? How can you become involved with and support the entities that manage water to help us all be better stewards of Sister Water and all God's creatures?
- If you are a *parciante* or irrigator on an acequia, be an active member. Help in the annual cleanings, involve the next generation, protect your water rights by putting them to beneficial use, support your commissioners and *mayordoma/o*, including asking how you can help them, and offer to organize community events to support or fundraise for the acequia. Help create a culture of mutualism and care.



Appendix IV

Readings and Resources

The suggestions below can help deepen your connection with Sister Water and help you advocate for her. This isn't a complete list but can be considered a sample of Catholic perspectives and New Mexico-based organizations.

Readings

Appalachian Catholic Bishops. (1975). *This Land is Home to Me: A Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia*.

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Newell, John Philip. (2011). Praying with the Earth: A Prayerbook for Peace. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.

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https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20030322_kyoto-water_en.html

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https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20231004-laudate-deum.html

Pope Francis. (2015). Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si': On Care of Our Common Home*. Online:

[vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-)

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Roberts, Elizabeth and Elias Amidon, eds. (1991). *Earth Prayers From Around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring Earth*. Harper, San Francisco.

New Mexico-based water advocacy groups

Amigos Bravos envisions New Mexico's rivers and streams running so "clear and clean we can bend to our knees, cup our hands, and drink directly from those waters without fear."
amigosbravos.org

New Mexico Acequia Association builds a movement to protect water and acequias, grow healthy food, and honor cultural heritage. The group also supports acequia communities and leaders to steward our sacred waters through diverse programming.
lasacequias.org

New Mexico & El Paso Interfaith Power and Light is a local interfaith group working to address the ethical, moral, and spiritual concerns of climate change and climate justice. They focus on educational and inspirational resources and events, engagement in public policy, advocacy for environmental justice, and care for sacred land, water, and air. nm-ipl.org

Communities for Clean Water includes a coalition of groups working to protect and care for water contaminated by Los Alamos National Laboratory. Their education and advocacy are rooted in culture, spiritual traditions, and science. Partners include Amigos Bravos, Breath of My Heart Birthplace, Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety, Honor Our Pueblo Existence, New Mexico Acequia Association, Partnership for Earth Spirituality, and Tewa Women United. ccwnewmexico.org

New Mexico Water Advocates calls for a balanced, equitable, and resilient water future for all of New Mexico through public education, engagement, and civic participation, with urgent

insistence on initiating and accelerating the transformative change necessary for New Mexico's successful adaptation to increasing water scarcity. mwateradvocates.org

National and global organizations

Catholic Climate Covenant helps U.S. Catholics respond to the Church's call to care for creation and those most affected by the climate crisis. It is grounded in the Church's deep history of teaching on creation, ecology, and the most vulnerable. It is a national nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., formed by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to address growing ecological awareness and the need to implement Catholic social teaching on ecology. catholicclimatecovenant.org

***Laudato Si'* Movement** has a mission to inspire and mobilize the Catholic community to care for our common home and achieve climate and ecological justice, in collaboration with all people of good will. It supports the Vatican's *Laudato Si'* Action Platform, serving Catholic individuals and institutions worldwide and helping the world's 1.3 billion Catholics bring *Laudato Si'* to life and save God's creation. laudatosimovement.org

***Laudato Si'* Action Platform** offers practical tools to protect our common home, equipping Catholic institutions and individuals to journey toward total sustainability in the spirit of *Laudato Si'*. It is sponsored by the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. The *Laudato Si'* Action Platform is offered as a service to the universal Catholic Church and to "all men and women of good will" and includes more than 900 resources contributed by partners across the globe. This is an excellent site for finding and sharing ideas for action. laudatosiactionplatform.org

Franciscan Action Network is inspired by the Gospel of Jesus, and the example of Saint Francis and Saint Clare. FAN is a collective Franciscan voice seeking to transform United States public policy related to peacemaking, care for creation, poverty,

and human rights. FAN sees the interconnectedness of all creation and the common origin of humanity rooted in God's loving design for Earth and all people. franciscanaction.org

St. Francis Institute for Animals helps Catholics respond with urgency and compassion to animal suffering and build a kinder world for all God's creatures. franciscanaction.org



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