



## Special Interest Articles:

- Sister Shannon Fox: This March Issue
- Save the Great Lakes, Save Ourselves
- Coastal Areas at Risk of Flooding



## Individual Highlights:

- Flint Michigan Water Crisis 1
- Action Steps 3
- E-Course on Year of Mercy 4

*Dorothy Pagosa, Marjorie White, Maxine Smith, Michele Richardson, Rose Grabowski, Rose Marie Bommer, Shannon Fox — Social Justice Committee*

## Water is Essential for Life by Sister Shannon Fox

*“Praise to you, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, humble, precious, and pure.”*

– St. Francis of Assisi

**W**ater is essential for life. Without it, we cannot exist. It is as central to life as air.

It is also an important symbol of our faith. We bless ourselves with it as

we enter church; it is used in the Sacrament of Baptism and mixed with wine in the Eucharist.

Yet, according to Living Water International (<http://www.water.cc/whywater>) about 633 million people lack access to improved sources of drinking water.

**T**his problem is only getting more critical to the survival of our species. One has only to look at

the drought in California and the water crisis in Flint, Michigan for proof.

**I**n this issue of *We Commit Ourselves*, you will learn about some current social justice issues regarding water conservation, as well as a few simple things we can all do to reduce our water footprint and conserve this precious resource. ■

## The Flint, Michigan Water Crisis

by Associate Maxine Smith

**T**he Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church (2004) makes the following statement:

**“The right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right.”**

A violation of this basic human right is occurring in my state of Michigan.

As a cost-saving measure, the City of Flint

stopped purchasing water from the Detroit Water Commission in April 2013. The plan was to purchase water from a new water pipeline with Lake Huron as its source.

Since the new pipeline would not be completed for three years, the city began drawing its water from the Flint River in April 2014.

**C**omplaints of brown, foul smelling water leaving sediments on the bottom of containers flooded Flint’s City Hall almost immediately after the switch.

The state reassured Flint citizens that the

water was safe to use and drink, even though it was found to contain high levels of a dangerous disinfectant by-product.

**B**y February 2015 a United States EPA manager notified the City of Flint that contaminants, including lead, were leaching into Flint’s water system.

- Citizens began to experience skin rashes.
- Blood tests showed that Flint’s children have dangerously high levels of lead in their blood.
- Residents continue to be charged for water they cannot drink, use to cook, or clean with. (Yet

*Continued on pg. 2*

## Save the Great Lakes, Save Ourselves!

by the Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes



Photo taken by Sister Shannon

"...water continues to be wasted, not only in the developed world but also in developing countries which possess it in abundance....there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behavior within a context of great inequality."

*Pope Francis  
Laudato Si, #31*

The Great Lakes provide 20% of the world's drinking water. They are at great risk.

### The Problem

As we write this statement there have been several incidents that are precursors to the potential destruction of the Great Lakes:

- In August 2014 there was an explosion at the British Petroleum refinery in Whiting, IN on

Lake Michigan. We are assured by the company that everything is fine, but this comes after an oil spill in March 2014. To this date, we have not been informed as to whether it was tar sands that spilled into Lake Michigan. BP in Whiting is one of the largest refineries for tar sands in the U.S.

- In July 2014 there was an outbreak of phosphorous induced toxic blue algae in Lake Erie near Toledo, Ohio which caused drinking water in the area to be contaminated. It is estimated that over 400,000 residents were affected.
- Enbridge Corporation is trying to transport tar sands by shipping it through Lake Superior and all the Upper Great

Lakes. "Wisconsin regulators tabled an earlier permit application for a tar sands crude oil maritime loading dock in Superior after residents objected." Eric Hanson, Midwest Energy News 4/15/2014.

- The Great Lakes do not stand alone. Rivers flow into the lakes. The Calumet River in Illinois flows into Lake Michigan. Pet coke (Petroleum waste) has been stored along the Calumet River and has been polluting it.
- In July 2010, an Enbridge pipeline break poured 840,000 gallons of tar sands crude oil into Michigan's Kalamazoo River. To date, the cleanup is not complete with over a billion dollars being spent.
- "Tiny particles of plastic have been added to possibly thousands of person-

*Continued on pg. 3*

*Continued from page 1...*

### Flint Water Crisis

the water rates in Flint are some of the highest in Michigan.)

The citizens of Michigan are reacting in two ways: Large donations of bottled water are sent to Flint daily. There is a petition to recall Michigan's governor, who brushes off calls to resign his office.

While donations of money, bottled water, and medical and psychological assistance (lead poisoning

is known to adversely affect cognitive development in children) will be needed in Flint for months, if not years to come, those responsible must be held accountable.

Sometimes it is not enough to only say "I am sorry." The water infrastructure of Flint, Michigan must be taken out and rebuilt so that lead plumbing can be replaced with safer pipes. People who cannot afford to leave

their homes must be assured that this problem will be fixed by the local, state, and federal branches of government.

The question I pose is this: *When will Flint's infrastructure be rebuilt and how long will the residents have to use bottled water to bathe and do their laundry?*

**Water is a basic human right, necessary for people to survive. ■**



Continued from page 2...

## Save the Great Lakes

- all care products sold around the world. These microbeads, hardly visible to the naked eye, flow straight from the bathroom drain into the sewer system. Waste-water treatment plants are not designed to filter out microbeads and that is the main reason why, ultimately, they contribute to the Plastic Soup swirling around the world's oceans. Sea creatures absorb or eat microbeads.

These microbeads are passed along the marine food chain. Since humans are ultimately at the top of this food

chain, it is likely that we are also absorbing microbeads from the food we eat. Microbeads are not biodegradable and once they enter the marine environment, they are impossible to remove.”

[www.beatthemicrobead.org](http://www.beatthemicrobead.org)

### What Should Be Done

- According to the Alliance for the Great Lakes, the U.S. and Canada should enact regulations or pass laws to meet the phosphorous targets from the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. Currently the Agreement does not

require the U.S. or Canada to do that.

- The “Halliburton Loophole” that allows a fracking exemption to the Safe Drinking Act must be overturned. Fracking also pollutes potable water.
- Tar sands and fracking should be discontinued as ways to provide energy into the future. Renewable energy sources should be invested in and used.
- Microbeads should be removed from all personal care products. ■

**Sister Dorothy Pagosa** is a member of the Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes.



## Action Steps

**Lent 4.2** from Liturgical Press <http://www.lent42.org/> in their reflections on water offered some simple and effective action steps we can all take to conserve and reduce our use of water:

- Kick the bottled water habit.
- In the Kitchen
  - Run the dishwasher only when fully loaded.
  - Turn off water when in use during food preparation and clean up.
  - Put aerators on faucets to help reduce household water flow by two gallons a minute.
- In the Restroom
  - Fix leaky faucets and

toilets.

- Reduce shower time.
- Turn off water when brushing teeth.
- Replace old toilets with modern low-volume dual-flush models.
- Don't throw hazardous waste and pharmaceuticals in the toilet.
- Other
  - Eat less meat – a hamburger can take 400 gallons of water to produce.
  - Only run your washing machine with full loads, use cold water.
  - Purchase products with minimal packaging. One pound of

plastic equals 24 gallons of water.

- Choose outdoor landscaping appropriate for your climate.

### WEB Resources

- Calculate your water footprint at [www.waterfootprint.org](http://www.waterfootprint.org)
- Watch the story of bottled water at [www.storyofstuff.org](http://www.storyofstuff.org)
- Living water international <http://www.water.cc/>
- American Museum of Natural History – exhibit on water. <http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/water-h2o-life>

*“Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.”*

*Our world has a grave social debt to the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.”*

— Pope Francis  
*Laudato Si'*



## 13M in Coastal Areas at Risk of Floods from Rising Seas

*Article written by Doyle Rice, published in USA Today*

**U**p to 13 million Americans who live in coastal areas are at risk of floods from rising seas because of climate change, a new study says.

Based on population forecasts for the year 2100, a 6-foot sea level rise would expose more than 13 million people to flooding and other hazards from rising seas.

Florida faces the most risk, where up to 6 million residents could be affected.

One million people each in California and Louisiana also could be affected.

**P**rojections are up to three times larger than current estimates, which

significantly underestimate the effect of sea-level rise in the United States," said study co-author Mathew E. Hauer of the University of Georgia.

"In fact, there are 31 counties where more than 100,000 residents could be affected by 6 feet of sea level rise," he said.

The study was published Monday [March 14, 2016] in the peer-reviewed British journal **Nature Climate Change**.

**M**illions of people may need to relocate, with the expected migration similar to that of the 20th-century Great Migration of southern African-Americans to the North, the study said.

Relocating the people would come with a price tag of \$14 trillion, study authors found.

**I**f the seas rose by 3 feet, 4.2 million Americans would have to move.

Scientists say manmade climate change will be the primary cause of future sea-level rise.

As the Earth's temperature warms, so do the seas. Heat-trapping green-house gases cause more land ice (such as glaciers and ice sheets) to melt and water to expand.

Warmer water simply takes up more room than cooler water. ■

*"We respect the earth and recognize that all life is interconnected in a continuing cosmic evolution."*

SSJ-TOSF Congregational Commitments  
26<sup>th</sup> General Chapter



**March 22:**  
World Water Day

[www.nature.org/water](http://www.nature.org/water)

### *Mercy Upon Mercy*

**I**f you are looking for a way to implement the Year of Mercy initiated by Pope Francis consider registering for the April E-Course, "**Journey into Mercy**" with Sister Joan Chittister.

Each day during the month of April you will

receive a short reflection on some aspect of mercy by Sister Joan and a daily suggestion to practice an act of mercy, either towards yourself, others, or some part of creation.

**"Journey into Mercy"** is co-sponsored by



Spirituality & Practice and Benetvision.

To register, [click here](#) or go to: [www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/ecourses)

### **REMEMBER...**

We welcome your submissions in the form of

- "Sightings"
- Brief write-ups of your activities, "prototypes," suggestions for workshops, books, articles, films, resources.

**Please send these to Sister Marge White** by the end of March for inclusion in the April 2016 issue of our newsletter, *We Commit Ourselves*, with theme being "earth."

~Your Social Justice Committee