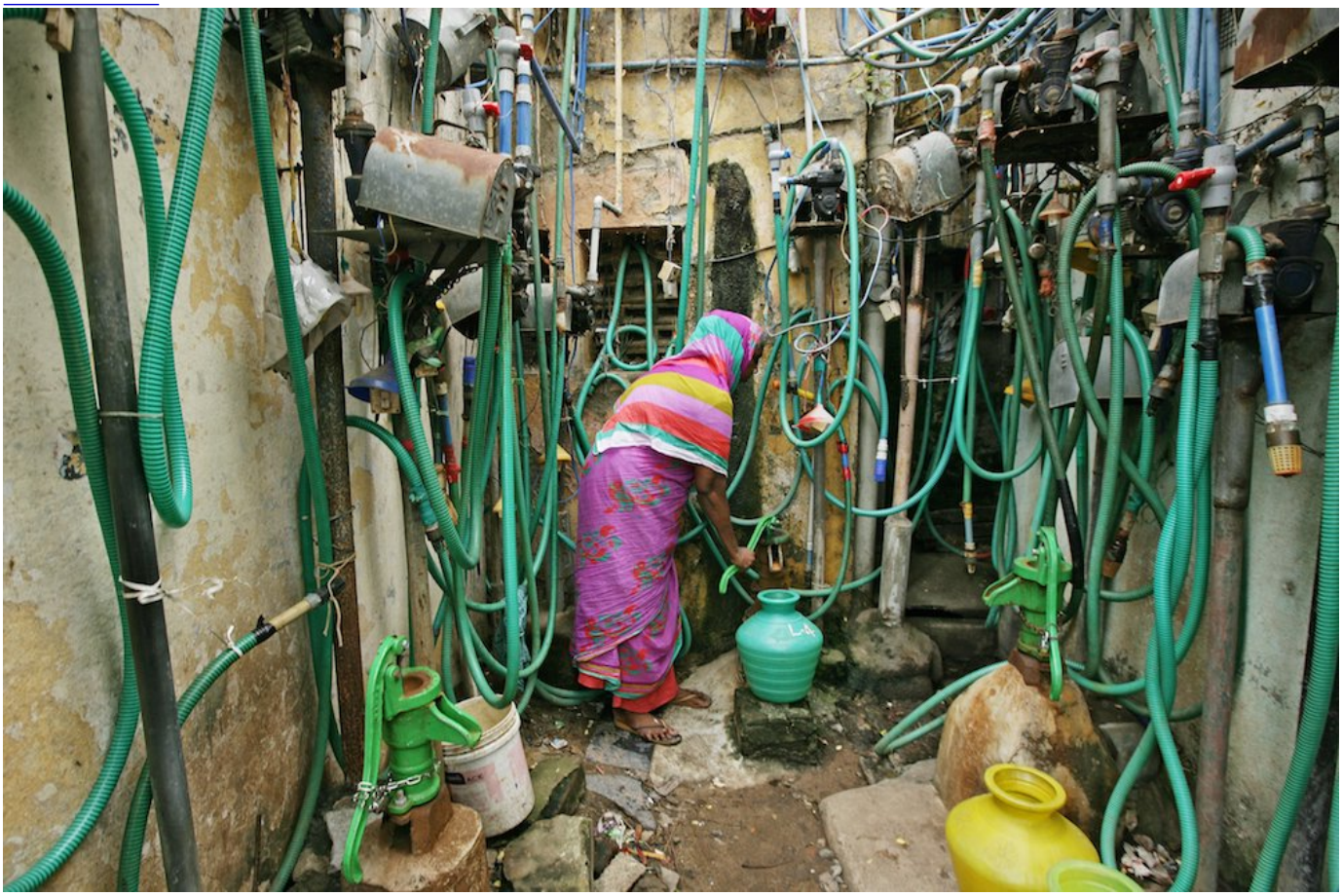
News
EarthBeat



A woman uses a hand pump to fill a container with drinking water in Chennai, India. (CNS photo/P. Ravikumar, Reuters)



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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the March 26 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

Considering how much of our planet is water, it seems strange that we call it Earth, rather than Ocean. So with World Water Day falling on March 22, it is appropriate that the Vatican's Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development devoted the week to aquatic ecosystems, drawing attention to and singing the praises of Sister Water, in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

Pope Francis launched the events in remarks after the Angelus prayer on March 21, when he called for clean drinking water and sanitation for all people. More than 2 billion people in the world lack safe drinking water and more than half the planet's 7.8 billion people have no sanitation facilities, according to the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

In 2020, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the Vatican appealed to bishops worldwide to ensure that Catholic healthcare facilities have "adequate access to water, sanitation and hygiene" — dubbed "WASH" in public health circles. An evaluation of 150 Catholic healthcare facilities in 22 countries is now under way to determine what is needed to meet that goal and how much it would cost.

But the dicastery devoted most of the week to oceans, which cover more than two-thirds of the planet's surface and drive weather, regulate temperatures, absorb carbon and are crucial to supporting life on Earth.

Ironically, despite their vital role, we know less about the oceans than we do about outer space. Even though four out of every 10 people in the world live within about 60 miles of a coast, 80% of the ocean remains "unmapped, unobserved and unexplored," according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.



(Franceso Ungaro/Unsplash)

The concentration of populations along shorelines is one reason why ocean pollution has become such a problem. NCR environment correspondent Brian Roewe reports on a major study by 44 scientists in 20 countries that found that pollution of the seas threatens not only marine life, but also human health. Nevertheless, the scientists say, it is still possible to stop the contamination.

Speakers at an online conference sponsored by the dicastery on March 25 stressed that while science is necessary for understanding marine ecosystems and their

importance, care for the ocean is a spiritual and ethical concern, and we are all responsible, writes Carol Glatz of Catholic News Service. Recordings of this week's dicastery-sponsored conferences about water, in several languages, are available here.

Anyone who has gone snorkeling or scuba diving around coral reefs probably remembers that first moment of awe, upon swimming into a riot of colors, textures and shapes unlike anything on land. There's a sense of wonder, combined with respect for one's own limitations, because humans can only spend time in that environment by artificial means.

The Guardian has recreated a bit of that feeling with an interactive journey into the depths of the ocean, pointing out some of the wonders of the marine world and the perils it faces.

"*Aqua fons vitae*, Orientations on Water: Symbol of the Cry of the Poor and the Cry of the Earth," the dicastery's document about water as the source of life, reminds us: "Taking care of springs, water basins and seas is an urgent imperative. However, it is not enough to take care of these, simply to avoid fines or to appear eco-friendly. It is of ultimate importance to respect the intrinsic value of water, in every context."

Here's what else is new on EarthBeat:

- Roewe reports that theologian Daniel DiLeo of Creighton University told an online audience that the U.S. Catholic church is failing to respond to the climate emergency, prompting a mea culpa from Archbishop Michael Jackels of Dubuque, Iowa, in his response to the lecture.
- A little-discussed section in President Joe Biden’s groundbreaking executive order on climate aims high. For the first time in federal policy, it pairs the urgent issues of leaking greenhouse gases with the creation of new jobs for energy workers and people who live in heavily-polluted neighborhoods. Ingrid Lobet reports for Capital & Main, a member of the Covering Climate Now consortium.
- EarthBeat's A Climate-Conscious Lent series continues, with Fr. Emmet Farrell reflecting on stormy weather, ocean pollution and climate skepticism, and encouraging a faith response. The series, like Lent, concludes next week.

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Here's some of what's new in other news:

- In Colombia, a man who spent the past two decades protecting and nurturing the habitat of the rare yellow-eared parrot, once thought to be extinct, was murdered, part of a deadly wave of violence against environmentalists in that country. Megan Janets reports for The Washington Post.
- A bit more than halfway through Biden's first 100 days in office, Peter Dykstra of Environmental Health News takes a look at the administration's progress so far on environmental issues.
- If bottom trawlers — fishing fleets that drag huge nets along the ocean floor — were a country, their greenhouse gas emissions would outstrip those of Germany, according to a new study by scientists who say those emissions need to be included in countries' carbon accounting. Joe Lo reports for Climate Home News.
- Despite some countries' efforts to reduce plastic waste, byproducts from fracking in the U.S. are fueling a boom in plastics manufacturing domestically and abroad, writes Beth Gardiner at National Geographic.
- And on the good news front, Nathan Rott of National Public Radio reports that a new survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service found 70,000 breeding pairs of bald eagles in the lower 48 states, up from 500 in the late 1960s.

Upcoming events:

"Justice for the Earth" is the theme of a virtual panel discussion to be sponsored by the University of Notre Dame Center for Social Concerns from 11 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. Eastern Time on March 27. Inspired by the Gospel and echoing the bishops' call to simplicity in *Justitia in mundo*, the panel will explore how we can best advocate for the Earth, from questioning our personal consumption habits and workplace norms to fostering domestic policy and international cooperation.

You can find more information about this and other upcoming events on the EarthBeat Events page.

Closing beat:

Water has been symbol of the sacred from time immemorial. What place in your life — a stream, a river, a lake, an ocean — has brought you close to the sacred? We give thanks for these places, and we invite you to share them on EarthBeat in 150 words or less, as a Small Earth Story or by writing us at earthbeat@ncronline.org.

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