News
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A red cross stands beside the grave of Notre Dame de Namur Sister Dorothy Stang, who was

A red cross stands beside the grave of Notre Dame de Namur Sister Dorothy Stang, who was assassinated in the Brazilian Amazon in 2005. The cross bears the names of 16 local rights activists murdered since Stang's killing, and church workers say another cross is needed for still more names. (CNS Photo/Paul Jeffrey)



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Editor's Note: *EarthBeat Weekly is your weekly newsletter about faith and climate change. Below is the Sept. 17 edition. To receive EarthBeat Weekly in your inbox, sign up here.*

Some years back, during a protest by Indigenous communities in one of Peru's largest and most polluted Amazonian oil fields, a delegation of oil company managers and officials from the national government arrived to negotiate a solution. Since the trip had been long and the weather was hot, a community member approached them with a tray bearing glasses of water.

The liquid had been drawn from the local source of water for drinking, cooking and washing — the Corrientes River, laden with sediment, metals and other pollutants.

The community leader who told me that story described, with a mixture of irony and glee, how the visitors had attempted to keep the water from touching their lips while trying not to appear to be rejecting the gesture of hospitality.

I remembered that incident a few years later, when I was reporting on an oil spill from a pipeline that passed through a different Amazonian community. Again, a government delegation arrived, and talks went on through the morning. At midday, the community leaders invited the officials to a lunch that had been prepared.

Two of the government representatives wondered nervously what they would be served to drink. They sighed with relief when they saw a bottle of water at the place set for each of the visitors.

Each of those half-quart bottles cost the equivalent of about $0.70 — well beyond the reach of families whose daily income might not be more than a couple of dollars. Everyone else at the table was served a fruit drink made with river water or rainwater.

Both of those anecdotes came to mind as I edited stories this week — it seems like this has been water justice week on EarthBeat.

On Sept. 13, the nonprofit watchdog group Global Witness reported that 227 people worldwide were murdered in 2020 for defending their territories — the water, forests and other ecosystems where they live. That's an average of more than four a week.

Many were protesting projects like mining or dams that would affect the quality or quantity of water available to their communities. Human rights experts say the real number of killings is probably higher, and that even more people suffered threats or were forced from their homes by land grabbers.

In countries like Colombia, Nicaragua and the Philippines, which had some of the highest per-capita murder rates, logging, mining and industrial agriculture, including cattle ranching and oil palm plantations, were the main sources of conflict with local communities.

Behind those activities lies consumer demand in distant places, including the United States, Europe and China. In a commentary for EarthBeat, Alex Mikulich suggests

five public policy areas in which changes could facilitate a shift from a destructive economy based on constant growth toward a "circular" economy that eliminates waste and pollution and emphasizes reusing, repairing and recycling products and materials.

Embracing those principles implies thinking differently about the place of humans in creation, writes Franciscan Fr. Daniel P. Horan, and recognizing, "as St. Francis did centuries ago, that we are truly siblings with all other creatures."

Such awareness would also help us appreciate the gift of creation, as Brenna Davis of the Ignatian Solidarity Network reminds us in this week's "At Home in Creation" reflections.

Davis shares a conversation she had with Teresa Tsosie, who reflects on the drought that has spread across the Navajo Nation's lands in Arizona. Davis also reminds us that even when we feel a desert within ourselves, we are promised the gift of living water that invites us to gratitude.

And in a Small Earth Story, Christina Randazzo, a junior at the University of Notre Dame, wonders whether we will take the steps needed to address climate change so her grandchildren can someday enjoy the lake that awakened her passion for sustainability

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

- The Associated Press reports that after years of protests by students, Harvard University announced that it will divest itself of fossil fuel holdings.
- And in California's Los Angeles County, the board of supervisors voted to ban new oil wells and reevaluate existing ones, reports Dharna Noor at Gizmodo. The 1,000-acre Inglewood oil field is the largest urban oil deposit in the U.S.
- Timothy Gardner at Reuters writes that the U.S. House of Representatives Oversight Committee has called on top executives of major fossil fuel companies and two lobbying groups to testify before Congress about industry disinformation campaigns aimed at stalling action on climate change.

- Meanwhile, in an interview with Bill McKibben for Yale Environment 360, environmental leader James Gustave Speth describes how U.S. administrations dating back to that of former President Jimmy Carter ignored scientists' warnings about climate change.
- The nations most vulnerable to climate change are calling for an emergency pact to address the impacts, reports Matt McGrath for the BBC.
- And not news, exactly, but my favorite this week: The winning entries in Grist's short story contest, "Imagine 2200: Climate Fiction for Future Ancestors," in which writers envision a more equitable future world "where no community is left behind."

Upcoming events:

This week's virtual events include the second in a series of presentations on "Vincentian Perspectives on Love and Justice for Creation" Sept. 19, and a lecture by Horan, who is also an NCR columnist, on "The spirituality of justice: racism and climate change, a Catholic response" Sept. 21.

You can find more information about these and other upcoming events on the EarthBeat Events page. And you can add your own group's events here.

Closing beat:

If you're looking for a way to celebrate the Season of Creation with your faith community, you might like the 14 Stations of Creation, or "Way of Beauty," based on *Laudato Si*' and created by Salesian Fr. Gilbert Choondal of Nitika Don Bosco in Kolkata, India.

Do you have a favorite Season of Creation resource to share with other EarthBeat readers? Drop us a line at earthbeat@ncronline.org and tell us about it.

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