



A fresh swimmable West Coast river

Photo: Trish Bruce



Fast Day for Climate Justice

Mercy2Earth is a worldwide campaign sponsored by the Global Catholic Climate Movement, to encourage us to reflect on Pope Francis' message to 'show mercy to our common home' and to put it into action. There will be two key moments in this process:

Lent—a time of preparation

Mercy2Earth Weekend (April 22-23) - a time of action.

Global Lenten Fast for Climate Justice on World Water Day—March 22

Water is life. Together on March 22, we will fast for bold action to face the climate change crisis and its life-threatening impact on water.

As part of our Mercy2Earth initiative, you are invited to join our fast for climate justice on World Water Day. Water is an integral part of life and the current climate crisis directly affects our water in ways that many don't realise. People from around the globe will be fasting and praying for the protection of our water and for all life that depends on it.

On March 22 we will pray for ourselves and the ways we have failed in caring for creation, and for our neighbours. We will pray for leaders to have the moral courage to protect our precious reserves of water. We will pray for all people whose communities have already been devastated by rising tides. And we will pray that all people will have access to clean, safe drinking water, especially in light of the changing climate.

Fresh water a basic human right

Ko au te awa, ko te awa ko au.

I am the river, and the river is me. This now famous whakatauki or proverb proclaims the intrinsic ties that bind the Whanganui River and its people to each other. Such close links, shared by Maori of all tribes, help to explain why water is such a topical issue in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Three years ago, Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand wrote to the government endorsing submissions relating to freshwater management made by the Methodist Church. The primary issue at the time surrounded water quality and the level

of purity required by law.

It may be time for another letter to be written. The government has set a new target of making 90 percent of our waterways swimmable by 2040. Prime Minister Bill English says the target strikes the right balance, but critics say it does not go far enough.

The new policy, which includes changes to water quality guidelines, was released last month. The target is based on meeting the swimmable water quality standard at least 80 percent of the time, in line with European and US definitions.

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What to do on the day of your fast:

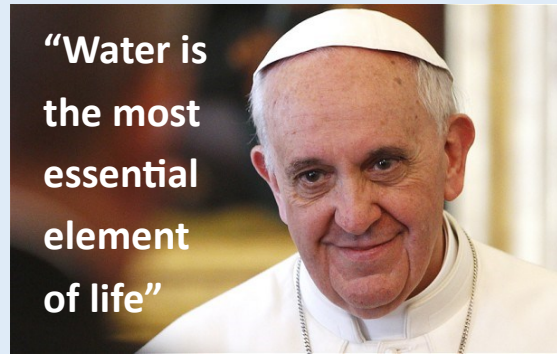
Those who are fasting are invited to organise events in connection with the fast. It can be a prayer service, an informal study session on *Laudato Si'* or the material outlined in this leaflet, or a group rosary focused on care of creation. Please share photos or stories of your event by using the hashtag #fastforclimate on Twitter, or by emailing us at hello@catholicclimatemovement.global

Medical reminder:

If you are going to take part in the fast (by 'fasting' we mean refraining from food during the whole day or at least by giving up one meal), please make sure you drink lots of fluids. If you feel dizzy, weak or light-headed, eat something straight away. You shouldn't take part in the fast if you are pregnant, under 12 years, diabetic or suffer from an eating disorder. If you have any doubts, check with your doctor first.

What do we pray for?

- For an urgent solution of the climate change crisis
- For the grace to grow in virtue, as better stewards of creation
- For easing the sufferings of the poor and those affected by disease and severe weather.



The UN estimates that over half the world's hospital beds are occupied with people suffering from illnesses linked with contaminated water. More people die as a result of polluted water than are killed by all forms of violence including wars.

Globally, two million tons of sewage, industrial and agricultural waste are discharged each year into the world's waterways. In the same time, at least 1.8 million children under five die from water-related diseases—one every 20 seconds.

NZ Forest and Bird estimates that half our native fish species are listed as threatened.

Nearly half of NZ's monitored lakes are so polluted they are now classed as 'eutrophic' - which means they contain more nutrients than they can cope with.

Run-off from dairy farms has severely affected NZ's rivers and lakes. In the past 20 years, fertilizer use has increased by 800%.

Share your testimony and encourage others:

Encourage others to join by sharing your testimony about why you fasted.

Send your testimony (one or more sentences) to g.catholic.climate.movement@gmail.com, or post prayers of encouragement at [facebook.com/ GlobalCatholicClimateMovement](https://www.facebook.com/GlobalCatholicClimateMovement).

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But freshwater ecologist Mike Joy said there had been a 'subtle shifting of the goalposts' for water quality, which could allow more faecal matter in river and lake water now deemed swimmable. He said there was now a one in 20 chance of getting campylobacter while swimming in a river rated 'excellent' by the Ministry of the Environment.

The Rural GP Network, representing rural doctors and nurses, said that 2040 was far too late for the country's rivers to be brought up to swimming standard. "We shouldn't have a situation where our waters are barely wadeable, let alone not swimmable," said the Network's chair, "or where the water can't be drunk by livestock or animals. "

A spokesman for the Freshwater Iwi Leaders Group said the new policy was an improvement but did not go far enough to put the environment first. "If decision-makers have to balance economic drivers against environmental ones, the wai (water) will always lose. That's the current position, and we need transformational change."

Perhaps the last word in this short overview can go to Pope Francis, who spoke on World Water Day last year, insisting that the future of humanity depends on safeguarding and sharing potable water around the world. Water, he said, " is the most essential element for life."