

## Ontario Provincial Convention 2019

### Oral Report

#### Ottawa Diocesan President Lynn Lavictoire

Madam President,

From a distance, it is a beautiful blue orb that hangs in the vast expanse of space. As we travel closer, the oceans can be seen separated from the lands and the beauty of this world is only enhanced, a reflection of the story of creation and the power of God's creative love. The lands and ocean form a vast ecosystem teeming with life; this is the place we call earth, our home. What is so precious about this planet is the water which gives it the colour and has made all life possible.

Water, a clear, odorless liquid, falls from the skies as rain, flowing into streams, lakes, rivers, and finally into the seas and oceans. It is from these sources we get fresh drinking water. We also use water to wash and clean, irrigate our crops, fish in it, and use it for hydroelectric power. And like the earth, water in the form of amniotic fluid also surrounds us as we are created in our mother's womb.

Beyond these physical needs, we are reborn as new spiritual beings in the waters of holy baptism; an action that Jesus made sacred over two thousand years ago when the Holy Spirit descended on Him.<sup>1</sup> We also bless ourselves with holy water so that we may be refreshed and sustained in our spiritual lives.<sup>2</sup> It reminds us of the promise of the waters of eternal life Jesus made to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well.<sup>3</sup>

We are graced by water in so many ways especially here in Ontario. Yet the same is not true for all people. Pope Francis warns in his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, that in many places the demand for water now "exceeds the sustainable supply, with dramatic consequences in the short and long term."<sup>4</sup> We need to heed his warning.

The statistics are alarming. Globally at least two billion people use contaminated drinking water and about one half million people die from it each year.<sup>5</sup> Even in Canada, there were 91 Indigenous communities with long-term drinking water

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 3.16-17.

<sup>2</sup> "Blessing of Holy Water Outside of Mass," *Catholic News Agency*, <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/prayers/circumstantial-prayers-and-blessings/blessing-of-holy-water-outside-of-mass>.

<sup>3</sup> John 4:14.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 28, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization, "Drinking Water," June 14, 2019, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/drinking-water>.

advisories last year.<sup>6</sup> Fortunately the federal government is committed to rectifying this problem by 2021.<sup>7</sup> As people of God, however, we need to support clean drinking water initiatives for all people.

The human problem is only part of the water issue. Our ecosystem, which is the cradle of life, is also suffering. Plastic bottles and other single-use plastics have found their way into our waterways ultimately ending up in the ocean creating large regions of floating plastic. The largest is called the "Great Pacific Garbage Patch" and consists of 79,000 tons of discarded plastic spread over an area of 1.6 million square kilometers.<sup>8</sup> Many countries have now banned single-use plastics or, like Canada, are considering bans.<sup>9</sup>

There are other environmental issues as well including climate change, extreme weather events, floods, and droughts. Dealing with these issues involves social change which might seem overwhelming, but like Jesus, we can start by doing it one heart at a time.

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<sup>6</sup> Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, "Key facts and figures regarding long-term advisories affecting drinking water systems on reserve," *Government of Canada*, <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1516741379405/1516741409130>.

<sup>7</sup> Indigenous Services Canada, "Ending Long-Term Drinking Water Advisories," *Government of Canada*, <https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1506514143353/1533317130660>.

<sup>8</sup> "Great Pacific Garbage Patch' is massive floating island of plastic, now three times the size of France," *ABC News*, March 23, 2018, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/great-pacific-garbage-patch-massive-floating-island-plastic/story?id=53962147>.

<sup>9</sup> "Canada to ban harmful single-use plastics and hold companies responsible for plastic waste," *Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada*, June 10, 2019, <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2019/06/10/canada-ban-harmful-single-use-plastics-and-hold-companies-responsible-plastic-waste>.