

# Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation News Congregation of the Sisters of Bon Secours



## Women and Water: Bringing Healing and Renewal to a World in Need

"Just as water has the power to cleanse and purify, women have the innate ability to bring healing and renewal to the lives of those around them." - Saint Teresa of Ávila

Women and water are two vital elements that sustain life and nourish communities. Women play indispensable roles in water management, access, and conservation. As a community committed to responding to the cry of the earth and the cry of those living in poverty, we honor the resilience and strength of women around the world who, despite facing challenges, lead efforts in water conservation, environmental protection and care for the most vulnerable. Their leadership is crucial in addressing issues such as water scarcity, pollution, and unequal access to water resources.

In this edition of the JPIC newsletter in honor of World Water Day and International Women's Day, we feature a story from the Bon Secours community in Ireland. Sr. Margaret Mary Hanafin, CBS, and Anne Bermingham, a Bon Secours Associate share a story of conserving water, regenerating the land, and creating an environment where both nature and people thrive.

### Reflecting on Women and Water...



"Water, like the love of a mother, is essential for the growth and sustenance of life. Let us honor and appreciate both these precious gifts."  
- Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Exploring the intersection of women and water is a fascinating topic that can delve into various aspects of culture, history, ecology, and social dynamics.

#### Reflection Questions to Ponder...

How has water been symbolically associated with femininity across different cultures and time periods?

What cultural rituals or beliefs highlight the connection between women and water?

What roles have women traditionally played in managing water resources, such as gathering, purifying, or distributing water in different societies?

How have these roles evolved over time, and what factors have influenced these changes?

How are women disproportionately affected by water-related environmental issues, such as access to clean drinking water, sanitation, and the impacts of water scarcity on health?

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### JPIC Days of Remembrance

March 3  
World Wildlife Day

March 8  
International Women's Day



March 22  
World Water Day

March 25  
International Day of  
Remembrance  
of the Victims of Slavery and the  
Transatlantic Slave Trade

March 31  
Easter



Cnoc Mhuire Wilding Garden

"Women are the real architects of society. They safeguard water and the seeds of life." – Vandana Shiva



Sr. Margaret Mary Hanafin, CBS, and Anne Bermingham, a retired Midwife, Healthcare Hospital chaplain, and Bon Secours Associate, both grew up in Ireland with traditions and family that supported reverence and care for creation. This love and respect for God's creation is part and parcel of their Irish culture and goes all the way back to Celtic spirituality.

Celtic people placed a strong emphasis on environmental stewardship. They realized that their faith and wellbeing was intimately tied to the health of the land and its resources. Their agricultural practices were sustainable and in harmony with the natural world. The Celt's valued community interconnectedness and wellbeing of the planet and all its inhabitants. They celebrated nature with festivals to mark the changing of seasons. Families gathered to support each other at sowing time and harvest time in a tradition referred to as "meitheal" which captures the Irish tradition of "working together for the greater good".

It is no surprise that with this cultural grounding Sr. Margaret Mary and Anne grew up to respect the land. They grew up in a generation where bathing was once a week, and minor cleaning daily. Waste was looked down upon and thrift was valued. So, when Pope Francis in his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si* invited people to generate a greater sense of wonder, awe and reverence for nature the Bon Secours community in Ireland was already on board.

The Sisters felt endorsed and heartened by the Bon Secours Mission focus of 2019, where they boldly stated: "We, Women of Healing, commit ourselves to defend and care for all of creation; to cry out with others against injustice and all that diminishes life on Earth". In response to their commitment, Bon Secours Sisters and the wider Bon Secours family decided to embrace the care for creation and bring it into the daily life of the congregation. In Ireland, they took steps to conserve water by creating rain barrels for watering the gardens, took shorter showers, turned off the tap water while brushing teeth and replaced old appliances and faucets with new energy efficient and low flow varieties. They continue to make great efforts to conserve all water. After washing dishes, instead of discarding the water down the drain, it accumulates in a bucket that is used later to water the garden or fill the bird baths.



Sr. Margaret Mary Hanafin,  
Beekeeper Paul and Sr. Michelle  
Sheehan with their LEGO beehive.

In addition to water conservation, the Sisters made a commitment to use their gardens by creating a habitat for biodiversity. They call them wilding gardens where shrubs, grass, plants, and wildflowers grow together in harmony. These gardens are not ploughed nor mowed, ensuring the nutrients and the carbon remain deep in the soil where they belong. They attract pollinators and have an impact on the surrounding neighborhood as the increase in pollinators supports healthier flowering trees and shrubs. Neighbors and friends have taken note and stopped mowing their lawns and embraced biodiversity. A friend even created a colorful beehive made entirely out of Legos. The gardens are a source of peace and spiritual rest for the many who visit them. They provide a safe space for both nature and humanity to thrive. In the words of Pope Francis, "Everything in nature speaks of the glory of God's creation and reminds us that we are all interconnected, so we must care for our mother earth."



Psalm 104: 1-11

**The JPIC Newsletter is moving to every other month and will have a new look! Stay tuned for the next edition in May!**

#### **JPIC Committee Members**

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Bless the Radiant One, O my soul! O Heart of my heart, You are so very great! You are clothed with justice and mercy, arrayed in Light. You stretch over the heavens like a tent, your Radiance covering the waters; You shine through the clouds, and ride on the wings of the wind; The wind, like the Breath of Life, carries your Word, Fire refines the dross of our souls. You set the earth on its foundations, strong and secure. You covered it with the deep like a garment, with many waters that life might come forth. At your word, the waters divided, becoming rivers and lakes and mighty oceans; storms came to ensure the balance and to renew the earth. The mountains rose, the valleys became low in the places that you did appoint. You brought harmony to all the earth, that life might spring fourth in abundance. You created springs to flow into the valleys; they flow between hills, Giving drink to every creature of the field, quenching their thirst as your Living Water quenches ours.

Adapted by Nan C. Merrill, Psalms for Praying

