

The logo for 'MERCY EARTH CHALLENGE' features the words in a bold, green, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a colorful, stylized flower or sunburst icon with six petals in shades of green, yellow, orange, red, purple, and blue. The background of the page has green triangular shapes in the top-left and bottom-right corners.

MERCY EARTH CHALLENGE

“Please commit to being more conscious of WATER – as a SACRED GIFT” (July 31, [Water: Sacred Gift daily calendar](#))

“... a community can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences. (Laudato Sí, #232)

Despite the constant degradation of Earth through the working for profit and personal benefit by many, there are those who work for justice and equity regarding the resources of Earth. There are costs, of course. The costs take place in everyday practice, and may seem unimaginable to some.

- [Learn lessons from water-poor countries](#) on how to save water and address what’s fast becoming a global crisis. The video is about 11 minutes long and has Spanish sub-titles.
- [This 13-minute video](#) (in Spanish. With English sub-titles) tells the story of Berta Cáceres of Honduras, who won the Goldman Environmental Prize, the world’s leading environmental award, for her fearless work to defend the Gualcarque River, its surrounding environment and people from the Agua Zarca Dam. She was assassinated for her activism in March 2016.
- Mercy Focus on Haiti has been working to improve communities’ access to water. See article below.

How are Mercys Responding?

Patricia Russillo, a friend of Mercy in New Jersey, shared that members of her household limit the number and duration of showers, don’t let the water run when brushing their teeth, and limit their clothes washing and the time used to run water to

wash dishes. They also limit watering their lawn and do so at the most optimal times, such as early in the morning to reduce evaporation.

Water Access in Haiti in a time of Pandemic and always

A primary challenge for those living in Gros Morne, Haiti, the center of the Mercy Focus on Haiti (MFOH) initiative, is not having access to water. The Sisters of Mercy are focused on this very issue, working to provide water now and a sustainable plan for the future. Addressing water, a crucial need in the sustainability of life, has been a key focus for the Sisters of Mercy in their attention to one of their Critical Concerns, Earth.

When walking or riding along the roads of Gros Morne, you inevitably see women and children carrying buckets of dirty water, on their heads. They must walk for hours each day, to have water for drinking, cooking, bathing and farming.

Now, due to many years of the accumulated stress of deforestation in rural Haiti, wells are running dry. Without trees, torrential rain runs swiftly down the mountainsides, wiping out homes and flushing soil out to sea. Shallow underground aquifers are drying up. The appearance of the pandemic, Covid-19, has only intensified this problem of access to clean water.

Collaborative organizations, called Konbits in Kreyol, have been supported by MFOH, by providing 25 heavy-duty plastic Chato Dos to the families in the Gros Morne area. A Chato Do is a 500-700 gallon cistern that captures the rainwater and filters it for use. With the harvesting of rainwater for home use and irrigation, children can go to school rather than spend a good part of their day collecting water from distant sources.

The recent placement of a Chato Do on the roof of Maison Bon Samaritan, a home for elderly and sick Haitians, has made possible the transportation of water to the bathrooms and kitchen of the residents. This now allows them the use of indoor toilets and not the outhouses they have used for years. They now have running water in the kitchen for cooking and a spout for the residents to wash their hands. This current access to clean water and indoor bathrooms addresses the safety and hygiene of the 24 residents and support staff during the Pandemic.

MFOH is in the process of seeking funding to build on-site cisterns for the 60% of Haitians who live over one mile from any road, to help harvest the rainwater. MFOH foresees introducing a construction process to build up to 1,000-gallon cisterns near the homes and farms of families in the more remote and mountainous areas of Gros Morne.

Our initial goal is to build 50 of these cisterns during the next year (one a week) at a cost of \$1,000 per cistern. Recipient families will provide the labor, MFOH will supply

the materials and a qualified engineer/mason to guide and supervise the construction and care of the cisterns.

At present the appearance of Covid-19 has added a greater challenge to these steps. We, MFOH, do not see our journey to address the needs of the water shortage curtailed, only the timeline has changed. At present we are in the midst of addressing the tremendous humanitarian needs of the people we work and partner with, now needing not only water but food and medical supplies.

In a recent conversation with one of our long-term partners, Steve Werlin from Fonkoze, he shared that water is still a tremendous and ever-growing need. Steve said that now is a “Perfect Storm” in Haiti, due to the erosion of so much soil, the political unrest this past year and now the presence of Covid-19. So we, MFOH, continue on working with our partners in Haiti, whose eyes and ears on the ground help us to see the needs of the people. We are grateful for them and their leadership at this time.

For the people of Haiti, water is a right, not a privilege. Mercy Focus on Haiti has made this a priority as we serve the people in Gros Morne, now and into the future.

For more information about Mercy Focus on Haiti, go to www.MercyFocusOnHaiti.org.

Submitted by Andi Healey and Sister Dale Jarvis, RSM, members of Mercy Focus on Haiti.

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