



COLUMBAN
MISSIONARIES
BRITAIN

Vocation for Justice

Autumn 2026

Living Water



Reflections and resources for the Season of Creation

Editorial

James Trewby, Co-ordinator of the Columban Justice, Peace and Ecology Team

Welcome to our Season of Creation 2026 edition of 'Vocation for Justice'.

We are invited to hear and respond to the "cry of the Earth" – and as I write this the need couldn't be clearer. We're seeing record temperatures and out of control wildfires, with the threat of another heat wave on the way. Perversely, this happens in a context of rumours of new drilling for oil in the North Sea and signs of fracture in the political commitment to getting to 'net zero'. This edition explores the Season of Creation theme of 'Living Waters' from multiple perspectives:

The article **'Living Water: A Call to Renew Our Relationship with Creation'** from the Laudato Si' Movement offers an introduction to this year's Season of Creation theme.

Sr Inez fcj's article, **'Faith as a Shield for Water on Merapi'**, tells the story of a community in Central Java hearing and responding to the cry of the Earth in a context in which water is recognised to be far more than simply a resource; "It is a cosmic inseparable sibling."

Rosemary Boissonneau is a climate justice activist and a student of ecotheology and scripture. Her article, **'From Canada: Reflections on Water'**, explores the theme of 'Living Water' with insights from Indigenous people of Canada.

'What if Net-Zero is Zero-Sum?' is an exploration of some of the different interests at play in conversations about 'net zero' from Dr Nicolette Burbach, Social and Environmental Justice Lead at the London Jesuit Centre. How should Catholics navigate the fact that "while we all have a stake in the planet, we do not have an equal stake, and this brings unequal incentives to protect it"?

Fr Kurt Zio Pala, a Filipino Columban missionary in Myanmar, looks back at Laudato Si' Week in his contribution, **'Eating with Our Hands'**. He tells the story of how his youth team decided to mark the week plastic free, and draws out learning about connection and presence, humility and simplicity, and community and sharing.

In her piece **'Spiritual Foundations for Committed Action'**, Jane Lavery, a volunteer member of Columban JPE team, explores what underpins her environmental actions.

Finally, continuing the 'Vocation for Justice' practice of inviting action, the **'Resources and Action Ideas'** page highlights a new Columban hymn written for the Season of Creation, a course to help form 'Christian Environmental Mobilisers', and an event exploring what it means to "love your neighbour" in an age of 'Us-Vs-Them' – please share!

This is our second electronic edition of 'Vocation for Justice'. Making a success of the new format will depend on growing the list of readers. Please share the materials, encouraging people to sign up to receive the newsletter electronically via the Columban website. We'd also be very grateful for feedback on the format and content. What works well? What would improve things? Please email me at education@columbans.co.uk.

Ellen Teague retirement

After 36 years of incredible service to Columban mission and loyal response to her own 'vocation for justice', Ellen Teague has recently retired. Regular readers will be aware of her many contributions, as a writer, journalist, speaker, active member of networks and groups, editor of 'Vocation for Justice', ... - it would be impossible to summarise her work in these few sentences! Her prophetic and persistent sharing of justice issues, analysis and actions have undoubtedly planted many seeds, encouraged and formed many of us in our work, volunteering and faith, and led to so much fruit. Thank you, Ellen!

If anyone would like to send Ellen a message on her retirement, please do so via me (education@columbans.co.uk) as she has asked not to be contacted directly at the moment.

A Call to Renew Our Relationship with Creation

Laudato Si' Movement

"Wherever the river flows, every living creature that swarms will live." (Ezekiel 47:9)

Every year from 1 September to 4 October, Christians around the world enter a special season of prayer, reflection, and action known as the Season of Creation. For many, it has become a cherished time to reconnect with God through creation and to renew our commitment to caring for our common home. The 2026 theme, Living Water, invites us to reflect on one of God's greatest gifts and one of the world's most urgent challenges.

Water flows through the entire story of salvation. In Genesis, God's Spirit moves over the waters of creation. The Israelites pass through the waters of the Red Sea into freedom. Jesus is baptized in the Jordan River and later offers "living water" to all who thirst. Water is both a source of physical life and a sign of God's grace.

Yet today, millions of people live without reliable access to clean water. Communities across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific face worsening droughts, floods, pollution, and water scarcity. Climate change is intensifying these realities, while the poorest communities—those who have contributed least to the crisis—often suffer the most. As Christians, we are called to see these realities through the lens of faith. Water is not merely a resource to be managed. It is a gift from God, a sign of life, and a reminder of our profound interconnectedness with all creation.

The prophet Ezekiel offers a striking image of hope. In his vision, water flows from the Temple and transforms everything it touches. What begins as a small stream becomes a mighty river, bringing life to barren lands and healing even the salty waters of the sea. Wherever the river flows, life flourishes. This vision speaks powerfully to our ecological moment. We often feel overwhelmed by the scale of environmental crises. Yet Ezekiel reminds us that transformation frequently begins with what appears small: a stream, a seed, a gesture of care, a community willing to act.

Across the world, faith communities are becoming signs of this living water. Parishes are restoring local waterways. Religious congregations are reducing pollution and protecting biodiversity. Young people are raising their voices for climate justice. Indigenous communities continue to share wisdom about living in harmony with the natural world. These efforts may seem modest compared to the challenges we face, but together they form a river of hope.

Pope Francis reminds us in *Laudato Si'* that "everything is connected." The water crisis cannot be separated from poverty, migration, health, or peace. When rivers are contaminated, communities suffer. When drought destroys crops, families face hunger and displacement. When ecosystems collapse, the most vulnerable bear the heaviest burden. For missionaries and people of faith committed to justice, care for creation is therefore not an optional concern. It is part of our response to the Gospel. To care for creation is to care for our neighbours. To protect water is to defend life itself.

The Season of Creation offers an opportunity to renew this commitment. It invites us to listen more deeply to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor. It calls us to pray, to learn, to advocate, and to act. Most importantly, it reminds us that hope is not passive. Christian hope flows outward, like a river, bringing life wherever it goes.

As we enter this Season of Creation, perhaps the question before us is simple: What might God be asking us to do so that living water can flow more freely through our communities?

The answer will look different in every place. For some, it may mean protecting a local river. For others, supporting climate justice initiatives, reducing waste, or educating future generations. For all of us, it begins with recognising water as a sacred gift and responding with gratitude, responsibility, and love. Wherever the river flows, life flourishes. May we become part of that river.

Visit: <https://seasonofcreation.org/>

Faith as a Shield for Water on Merapi

Inez fcj

Listening to Nature

For farmers living on the slopes of Mount Merapi, the volcano is more than a mountain—it is a sacred living presence. Its springs and rivers nourish the entire environment, including humans and rice fields. But in the mid-1990s, unregulated sand mining began to scar the watershed. Hundreds of trucks rumbled through villages each day, stirring up dust and noise. Water tables dropped. Soil lost its fertility. Wildlife reduced. The social cohesion began to unravel. Alcohol and prostitution crept in, and those who spoke out faced intimidation.

Faith in Action

In the face of these challenges, the Catholic Parish of Ngargomulyo in Central Java chose a community-rooted approach to tackle the issues. Parishioners, environmentalists, and scholars came together to reflect on what had been lost due to sand mining. One significant thing for them as farmers was water. On 16 February 2015, this reflection gave birth to Gerakan Masyarakat Cinta Air (GMCA), the Movement of People Who Love Water. GMCA's mission was practical and spiritual. It proposed water conservation, resisted unregulated mining, weaved local culture into advocacy, and brought ecological awareness into church liturgy. In practice, it included reforestation of hillsides and cleaning rivers and springs.

GMCA draws its strength from tradition and spirituality. People understood that neither protest nor technical solutions alone would be enough. They turned to Javanese cosmology “sedulur papat lima pancer,” and enculturated it with Catholic theology. “Sedulur papat lima pancer” is a Javanese philosophy, considering that each person comes into the world accompanied by four spiritual siblings—earth, water, wind, and fire. In this way, humans live in unity with these elements, not above them, but alongside them, bound together in kinship.

For these farmers, water is far more than a resource. It is a cosmic inseparable sibling. To harm water is to harm oneself. This deep sense of connection echoes Catholic theology, which teaches that nature, including water, is God's creation, and therefore, is sacred. Water flows through the heart of crucified Jesus. Water is used in baptism and blessings, symbolizing purity, renewal, and grace. Both Javanese cosmology and Catholic faith remind humans that water is God's blessing to be used, respected and protected. This blend of traditions and spirituality becomes visible during “Peasant Christmas” celebrations. Outdoor celebrations are held at various locations, such as springs, former mining sites, or rice fields. During these events, springs, seeds, agricultural equipment, and cattle are often blessed, restoring their sense of sacredness. These celebrations attract people from different religious backgrounds, with Muslim neighbours participating in Christmas celebrations, united by a shared reverence for water.



Blessing the spring - photo from Tommy Tjoen, an FCJ student

The Cultural, Moral and Spiritual Centre

Farmer-philosopher Wes Jackson once distinguished between “problems in agriculture”: like soil loss or water scarcity, and “the problem of agriculture”: human's lost connection with nature. Most global solutions focus on quick fixes, including new technology, better irrigation, and improved policies. But as GMCA's story shows, these efforts often miss the deeper need: to restore the relationship between people and nature.

By grounding their struggle in Catholic social teaching, especially the belief that water is a universal human right, and in the Javanese tradition that water is a cosmic sibling, the people of Ngargomulyo have given their movement moral weight and spiritual depth.

The message from Merapi's slopes is simple but powerful: When water is considered as sacred, defending it is more than an environmental act. It is an act of faith. It crosses religious boundaries, and sustains nature that gives humans food and life.

From Canada: Reflections on Water

Rosemary Boissonneau

On this summer day, I sit down at my home in Toronto, Canada to write about “living water”, this year’s theme for the Season of Creation. The fresh breeze and clear sky belie the fact that recently my city’s air was so polluted with smoke from the wildfires to the north that we were told to stay indoors. Beyond my backyard, news of the historic draught in Britain and the unprecedented wildfires in France and Spain cast gloom on my summer day. Climate change and its devastating effects have undeniably gripped the world, leaving us thirsting for “living water” both literally and spiritually.

In Canada, the idea of “living water” is not often part of everyday consciousness. While Canada is blessed with an astonishing amount of water, it is often taken for granted and sorely misused. Across its great expanse, Canada contains more freshwater lakes than all the rest of the world’s countries combined! Nonetheless, despite the beauty and abundance of Canada’s waterways, most Canadians do not attribute any spiritual value to water nor feel a moral duty to care for it. Because of water’s abundance and the dominant settler-colonial mentality, Canadians do not usually respect water as a gift but treat it as a commodity to be consumed, polluted, drained and rerouted in pursuit of economic gain. Examples of water’s misuse are legion—from enormous toxic tailing ponds left behind by petroleum extraction, to ecosystem-destroying hydro electric dams and the consumption and pollution of local waterways by industrial manufacturing and mining.

However, water is understood very differently by the Indigenous people of Canada (or Turtle Island as it is called in Indigenous culture). Water is at the heart of Indigenous spirituality, and the idea that water has a living spirit is a common and deeply held belief. All the waters of the world, from the oceans to the smallest stream, are joined together as Mother Earth’s bloodline, giving life to and nourishing the whole earth and all her inhabitants, human and other-than-human creatures alike. Water is a living relative, a teacher and source of strength that remembers everything that we do to her. But water cannot speak for herself, so we all have a responsibility to give voice to advocate for her, protect her, and in the face of her abuse, pray for her and work towards her healing. Indeed, the Indigenous relationship with water is rooted in prayer and ceremony. The most poignant of these is the water walk, a multi-day ceremonial prayer for water in which women, the traditional water carriers and protectors, carry small quantities of water along the route of sacred waterways. On these walks, every step is taken in prayer and gratitude for water, our life-giving force.

And yet, Indigenous peoples are those most harmed by water’s misuse in Canada. Currently, around 60 Indigenous communities cannot safely drink their water, with some water advisories having been in effect for decades. Many other Indigenous peoples find their sacred waters threatened by industrial pollution, including Grassy Narrows First Nation in Ontario which has been impacted by mercury contamination for very many years. All this while Canada’s federal government spends 18 times more in fossil fuel subsidies than on providing communities with clean water. Water injustice is most strongly felt in Canada by those who respect water the most.

In this Season of Creation may we join the Indigenous peoples of Canada to pray with and for the living waters of this earth that she be healed and bring healing to a world thirsty for her living spirit.

Rouge River in
Ontario
- Photo by author



What if Net-Zero is Zero-Sum?

Dr Nicolete Burbach, London Jesuit Centre

The early climate movement portrayed net-zero in non-zero-sum terms: we are all in this together, all sharing in and benefitting from a healthy climate. However, in her recent book, *Existential Politics*, the economist Jessica Green argues against this: the fossil fuel industry faces an existential threat from net-zero. This means that those who own the fossil fuel industry have a powerful material interest in resisting net-zero—for example by lobbying for carbon trading systems that disguise rather than offset emissions, and systems of self-regulation that inhibit accountability.

These interests may also outweigh any deeper interest in the health of the planet. Many of those who own the fossil fuel industry will not live to see the worst of climate change, and those that will may be insulated from many associated harms by their wealth. In this context, they are arguably more threatened by the radical economic transformations needed to genuinely address the problem than the problem itself. In short, while we all have a stake in the planet, we do not have an equal stake, and this brings unequal incentives to protect it.

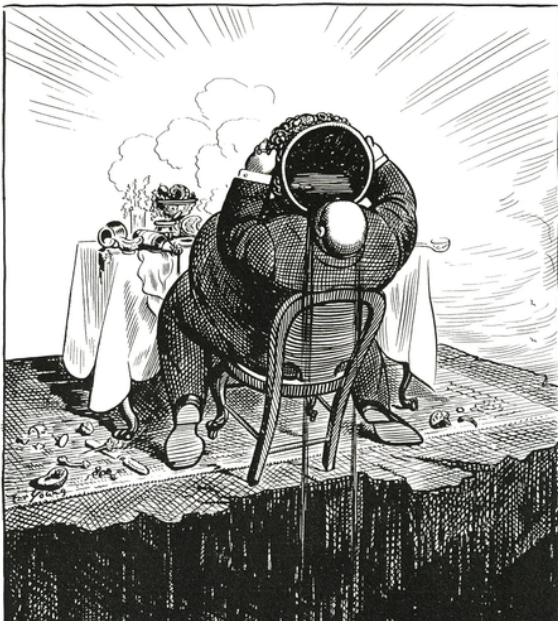
Net-zero is, in this crucial respect, a zero-sum game after all.

This situation has some practical implications: individual actions to reduce one's carbon footprint are important. However, a great deal also hangs on high-level decision-making, and the willingness to make these decisions specifically against powerful business interests. It is therefore vital that we do not allow our efforts at addressing the climate crisis to end with individual actions. Rather, we must work collectively to bring pressure on political and business leaders, counteracting or removing the material incentives to which we and the planet are currently hostage.

However, this situation also has a deeper significance. Green's analysis is challenging from a Catholic perspective: Catholic Social Teaching teaches that people form societies to provide goods that we all need, but cannot obtain for ourselves as individuals. In this way, society is founded upon a shared orientation towards the Common Good. Unity and shared interest are thus more fundamental to society than conflicts of interest.

Green's analysis is troubling because she raises the spectre of fundamental conflict: if she is right, then we live in a world where society serves partial rather than common interests—regardless of its original or proper nature. Those who own the fossil fuel industry have interests that directly conflict with those of others, and through lobbying and other methods have co-opted society at the level of government and the economy to protect their interests—at the expense of both others and the planet in general.

So what are we as Catholics to make of this?



Despite everything, we do still have an interest in common: Differing material incentives may make it difficult to locate this shared interest in material things—but humans are not made for material ends alone. We are “not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion” (*Laudato si'* no. 220) that goes beyond our own material interests. This means that a good human life is a moral life, in which we genuinely treasure both human and non-human creation as a gift from God. In this respect, no one can genuinely have a good life while failing to respect the dignity of others and the world we share.

It is therefore the task of Christians to pursue worldly justice not merely as justice, but as evangelisation, calling business leaders back to the moral life for which God has created us. Worldly justice is not solely important in a worldly sense, and while emissions can be traded, omissions cannot. It thus falls on us to remind those who own the fossil fuel industry that, even if our material incentives differ, justice is in their best interests nonetheless.

**'Capitalism' by Art Young, from
cartooningcapitalism.com**

Eating with Our Hands

Kurt Zio Pala SSC

"Are we going to eat with our hands?", one youth asked as we discussed how to celebrate Laudato Si' Week. I approached the Myitkyina Parish Youth leader together with his committee to ask them to facilitate two activities - celebrate the opening of the Laudato Si' Week with the celebration of a Mass for Creation and film-showing of the documentary "The Letter" to parish youth followed by a panel discussion allowing young people to ask questions from a panel composed of youth development workers.

Traditionally, many Burmese people (Bamar) eat with their hands (especially rice and curry), although chopsticks are also commonly used in Myanmar, particularly for noodles and some dishes. Kachin people traditionally also eat with their hands, especially when eating rice-based meals and traditional dishes. In Kachin culture, eating is often a communal experience around shared dishes, and hands are an important part of connecting with food.

As a Filipino, I also eat with my hands at home. But since arriving in Myanmar I have learned to use bamboo chopsticks when eating. Most shops in the country use single-use bamboo chopsticks wrapped in plastic. Shops and markets also always use single-used plastics when packaging or selling products. During events single - used plastics continue to be used to wrap tables and food. Food wrapped in leaves are provided but are now wrapped in single-used plastic. Small water-bottles are also distributed to everyone. After every event, we generate large amounts of plastic wastes.

This was not always the reality. Traditional leaves were used to wrap food in the past. Mothers would carry baskets to the market. Drink from bamboo cups and ate with our hands. We never used plastic.

That day the group decided to celebrate a "plastic free" Laudato Si' Week.

Have you tried eating with your hands?

When we receive Christ, we receive him with our hands. Hands that are bruised and wounded. Hands that also touch and help friends. Hands that toil the land and protect it. Hands that harvest and finally hands that bring the fruits of the Earth to God.

Three lessons we can learn from eating with our hands:

Connection and Presence — "Food is relationship." When we eat with our hands, we touch, feel, and experience the food directly. It reminds us that eating is not only about filling our stomachs but about being present and connected. Jesus often shared meals with ordinary people. The table became a place of friendship, acceptance, and communion.

Humility and Simplicity — "We are part of creation." Using our hands reminds us that we come from the earth. Before tools and utensils, humans used their hands to gather, prepare, and share food. It can teach gratitude for farmers, nature, and the work behind every meal.

And finally, **Community and Sharing** — "No one eats alone." Hands are used to share food, serve others, and participate in a common meal. In many Asian and Indigenous cultures, eating together strengthens family and community bonds. Kachin cultural connection: Traditional meals often emphasize hospitality, generosity, and sharing. The act of offering food is a sign of respect and relationship.

Hands remind us that food connects us — to God, to the earth, and to one another.

This year's Laudato Si Week theme "From Hope to Action," reminded us that the time to ACT is NOW. The Earth cannot wait. Let's start eating with our hands.



Fr Kurt and friends

Spiritual Foundations for Committed Action

Jane Lavery

I believe we can truly say that the Climate Crisis has now arrived. The highest temperatures ever recorded, drought, dreadful wildfires, all occurring right across Europe, which is the continent currently experiencing the world's fastest increase in temperature. Many would say we are getting our just deserts. Even climate deniers are admitting that it's getting hotter, though they are not convinced it's due to human action, and want to keep digging for oil and gas.

I often wonder why I'm still insisting on my 'save the planet' principles when those around me don't seem to care. I buy only the things I need, making sure that everything is LOAF (Local, Organic, Animal-friendly and Fairtrade – I think LOEF, Environmentally friendly), walk or travel by public transport, and use as little energy and water as possible. Meanwhile, rockets are blasting into space, privately-owned jets are constantly flying across the world, and the current vogue is buying! Being of a certain age I know I won't be around to see the full impact of the crisis, and although I am very concerned for my family, particularly the younger children, and worry about how they will manage in the coming times, I feel that until those who have the power actually understand the severity of things, nothing I do will make any difference, except to me.

But then I think about a book that I read as a Lenten study a few years ago called 'Saying Yes to Life' by Ruth Valerio, currently a Canon Theologian at Rochester Cathedral, who works tirelessly in the fields of theology, environmentalism and social activism. In it, Valerio writes of a scenario in which she spent time and effort making a beautiful hanging tapestry, and proudly hung it on the wall in her home. She came home one day to find that her children had torn it from the wall, rummaged around trying to pull out certain coloured threads, and trampled it with muddy boots. I'm sure you see the analogy. Valerio asks us to consider how she would have felt in such a situation, and to think of God's response when God sees the beautiful creation that is our planet being desecrated by the humans who are also created beings.

"God saw all that had been made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31). God created everything out of love, and God loves everything that is created. Yet humans, who are supposed to be the apex of creation, and should tend the world that was lovingly created by God, are tearing it apart. As Christians, followers of Jesus, the co-creator: The Word was with God in the beginning. All things were created by him. (John 1:2-3). Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si'* "It is good for humanity ... when we believers better recognise the ecological commitments which stem from our faith." He also states that "we are called to recognise that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes", and to reiterate this point quotes the German Bishops' Conference: "Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection ... Each of the various creatures, willed into its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. [People] must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things". Francis also insists "everything is interconnected, and ... genuine care for our own lives and our relationship with nature is inseparable from fraternity, justice and faithfulness to others". Thank you, Pope Francis.



Living Water

Season of Creation 2026

IMMERSION IN LIVING WATER

Ezekiel 47:9, 12

Resources and Action Ideas

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The Good Samaritan, Kelly Latimore



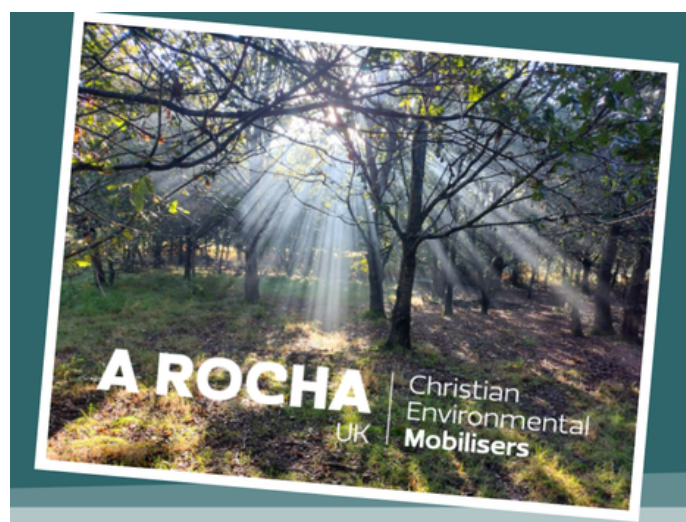
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'LIVING WATERS' - A NEW HYMN FOR THE SEASON OF CREATION

Columbans around the world have worked together to write and record a hymn inspired by this year's Season of Creation theme.

Score, backing track, powerpoint and recording available from www.columbans.co.uk



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Front cover image - from Laudato Si' Movement