

Embracing a Great (Lakes) Idea

By Gayle Rzany, Associate

The Catholic Climate Covenant website (www.catholicclimatecovenant.org) notes that “human activity is warming our planet at an unprecedented rate and is contributing to the tragic wildfires, heatwaves, droughts and floods harming people and communities of our nation and world today.

“Solutions exist now that can help slow and even reverse this climate warming and create a healthy and thriving future for all,” the site continues. “However, to move this vision forward, we need faith-filled voices to strengthen our nation’s moral and political will to enact bold policies that dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and care for the common good.”

In response to this need, the Religious Coalition for the Great Lakes (RCGL) was formed in 2005. This inter-congregational coalition studies issues, shares ideas and articles, and combines actions. Its members support one another in our quest to promote a better environment and quality of life for those living near any of the Great Lakes.

The School Sisters of St. Francis have been represented by Sister Phyllis Wirtz, Sister Donna Marie Preston, and Sister Dusty Farnan, OP. I am our community’s current representative.

Current membership includes sisters living in Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, and New York, as well as Canada. In addition to our community, there



are representatives from our “cousins,” the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis, and the Adrian Dominicans, Sinsinawa Dominicans, the “Lake Franciscans,” Sisters of the Holy Cross, Sisters of St. Joseph of LaGrange, Holy Spirit Missionary Sisters, and the Grey Nuns of the Sacred Heart.

The initial impetus of the RCGL was to work for the ecological integrity of Lake Michigan. However, it quickly became apparent that whatever affects this lake affects the entire water system of the Great Lakes.

Since the formation of the RCGL, the members have addressed local, national, and international topics. Locally, we have verified whether or not each congregation participant has a policy regarding water use at community events, and we found that responses varied. For example, some communities still use

bottled water at large congregational functions; others make an effort to use tap water, either as is or filtered. Some communities have also installed water-saving toilets and washing machines.

The RCGL has researched to determine what organizations in each of our states are working to address water issues. Currently some of these groups include the Alliance for the Great Lakes, the *Laudato Si'* Movement, Green Faith, Citizens' Climate Lobby, HOW Coalition, and Milwaukee Riverkeepers.

Much work remains to be done. If you would like to participate in our Zoom meetings, please let me know and I'll be sure you can get connected. I can be reached by email at g.razz918@hotmail.com. Your ideas, thoughts, and prayerful support of our efforts are most appreciated!