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NEWS RELEASE | PRESS CONFERENCE

Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe, Releases
New Pastoral Letter Inviting Reflection and Action on the Sacredness of Water

PRESS CONFERENCE FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, AT 9 A.M.
Tingley Beach, 1800 Tingley Dr. SW | Albuquerque, NM 87104

ALBUQUERQUE—Tuesday, September 8, 2026—IMMEDIATE RELEASE— Most Reverend John C. Wester, Archbishop of Santa Fe, will hold a press conference Friday, September 11 at 9 a.m. at Tingley Beach in Albuquerque. Archbishop Wester released a new pastoral letter titled "Uniting for Our Sacred Waters: Conversation and Action Around the Sacredness of Water," inviting people of faith and all people of goodwill to reflect on water as both a sacred gift from God and a shared responsibility requiring protection, stewardship, and action. Speakers include Laura Paskus, longtime environmental journalist and author, who will discuss the science of water and the impacts of a changing climate on New Mexico; and Paula Garcia, executive director of the New Mexico Acequia Association, who will address water policy and the role of acequias in protecting New Mexico's water future, among others.

The pastoral letter, released September 2026, marks the eleventh anniversary of Archbishop Wester's first pastoral visit to Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo following his installation as Archbishop of Santa Fe in 2015. During that visit, on the Feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, Archbishop Wester joined members of the Pueblo community in blessing water drawn from the Rio Grande and participating in ceremonies that highlighted the deep spiritual and cultural significance of water.

"Water flows throughout the days of our lives, touching our bodies and souls with the healing, renewing, refreshing, and life-giving grace of God," Archbishop Wester writes. "We must treasure this precious resource and channel it into life."

Drawing from Catholic sacramental life, Indigenous wisdom, and contemporary environmental challenges, the letter examines the spiritual significance of water while addressing urgent concerns surrounding water scarcity, access to clean water, environmental degradation, climate change, and the disproportionate impact these issues have on economically poor and vulnerable communities.

Archbishop Wester reflects on water's central role in Catholic life through baptism, blessings, liturgical celebrations, and funeral rites, while emphasizing that access to clean water is a fundamental human right and a matter of justice and human dignity.

The pastoral letter also highlights local and global concerns, including the shrinking flow of the Rio Grande, drought conditions throughout the American Southwest, the impact of wildfires and flooding in New Mexico, and communities around the world suffering from conflict and limited access to safe drinking water.

The pastoral letter was inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical Laudato Si' and released during the Roman Catholic Church's observance of the 800th anniversary of the death of Saint Francis of Assisi. It is also the Season of Creation, which runs from September 1 to October 4, the Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. The letter calls individuals, parishes, schools, and civic leaders to engage in meaningful dialogue and practical action to protect and preserve water for future generations. Pope Leo XIV also focused on access to clean water in his September prayer intention: "For the care of water. Let us pray for a just and sustainable management of water, a vital resource, so that everyone may have equal access to it."

The Archdiocese of Santa Fe hopes the pastoral letter will inspire renewed appreciation for the gift of water and encourage collaborative efforts to safeguard this precious resource while recognizing its profound spiritual significance.

The full pastoral letter, resources, and opportunities for continued conversation and action are available at archdiosf.org/water

LOCATION NOTE: Upon entering Tingley Beach, turn right and continue to the large parking lot. From the west side of the parking lot, a short trail leads to the river overlook and press conference site. Parking is free and the trail is easily accessible.