



History and Roots

Waterspirit – A Perfect Marriage of Ecology and Spirituality

by Jan Linley

Sister Suzanne Golas grew up in New Jersey spending summers at the beach where a lifelong love affair with the sea began. When she was a young woman, she had a metaphysical experience at the shore. Lying on the beach, the waves washed up over her legs, and she felt herself not only pulled by those waves but becoming one with the ocean. That powerful experience stayed with her and spoke to our oneness with creation.

So, it's no wonder that when her term as Congregation Leader ended in 1996, she had the bold and prescient idea of starting Waterspirit, a program that would wed ecology and spirituality, helping people not only understand the connection between the two but teaching the importance of care of creation. The very name Waterspirit invokes the union. It was founded, in Sister Suzanne's words, "to educate people of all ages on global, regional and local water issues, inspiring them to preserve and protect water through personal behavior and support of systemic changes. However, at the heart of all

Waterspirit programs and activities is the deepening of a spirituality that recognizes the sacredness of nature, the interdependence throughout creation and the role of water in sustaining all life."

Until a few years ago, Waterspirit's home was the Congregation's former retreat center, Stella Maris, on the ocean in Elberon, New Jersey. I attended one of Sister Suzanne's early Waterspirit programs there, truth be told, to see what Waterspirit was about but also for a little seaside healing. The weekend did not disappoint on either score. In those early programs Sister Suzanne encouraged participants to enjoy and connect with the ocean and environment around us through long walks, meditation, sitting on one of the outside porches or in the pavilion that overlooked the ocean. She asked us to remember and share our earliest connections to a body of water, be it ocean, lake, river, or stream, and without proselytizing, helped us see those bodies of water as holy, tapping into a deep soul connection to them. Sister Suzanne taught us about our local watersheds, how to better conserve



Sister Suzanne Golas engages young program participants.

water and ways to respect the divine in it. Water is sacred and is integral in many rituals, regardless of religious denomination.

Waterspirit was and is both organizer and participant in water advocacy. Sister Suzanne recognized the value and power of collaboration to affect change. Early on, she connected with Clean Ocean Action in New Jersey, Religious Organizations Along the River (ROAR), Religious on the Water (ROW) and as the United Nations Representative for the Congregation, with Religious at the UN (RUN) among several other groups.

Sister Mindy McDonald remembered participating in an early beach clean-up. "I learned new stuff about equipment I was using every day. When we found a red container of used syringes (marked hazardous waste... but somehow on our local beaches) I learned that we could trace its origin from the numbers stamped on the side, as well as trace its journey from medical facility to swimming beach. Clean Ocean Action kept meticulous records and could bring action against waste collectors, if necessary."

The spirit in Waterspirit was ever present, in educational retreats and programs and in the many events hosted by Waterspirit at Stella Maris. Those included solstice and equinox celebrations, drumming circles, Celtic and Eco spirituality programs, children's educational programs, book groups and more. Waterspirit programs also travelled to states beyond New Jersey.

Sister Suzanne has retired, but the ministry goes on as you can see in our interview in this issue with Blair Nelsen, the current executive director of Waterspirit. Like many of the sisters' sponsored ministries, Waterspirit has changed to meet the needs of the times. We encourage you to visit the website to learn about the exciting ways Waterspirit is engaging to foster change and connect spirituality to care of creation: www.waterspirit.com.



we invite you to connect & participate

consider becoming a sister

In the USA contact:

Sister Coralie Muzzy, CSJP, Congregation Vocation/
Formation Director, cmuzzy@csjp-olp.org

In the UK, contact:

Sister Maureen Brennan, CSJP, Regional Vocation
Director, maureenbrennancsjp@gmail.com

consider becoming an associate

Women or men who share our concerns and
charism, contact:

Sister Coralie Muzzy, CSJP, Congregation Vocation/
Formation Director, cmuzzy@csjp-olp.org

request prayer support

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything,
by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let
your requests be made known to God.*

—Philippians 4:6

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