



# FESTIVAL OF FAITHS

## Sacred Water: Sustaining Life



CENTER FOR INTERFAITH RELATIONS



*“Many Faiths, One Heart, Common Action”*

Faith in Action Tool Kit

Volume 1

SACRED WATER:

# Sustaining Life

Sustaining life

*A Brief Look at Our Water through the Eyes of Faith*

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*Written by Eric Burnette for the Festival of Faiths in Louisville, Kentucky*

A QUESTION:

## Is water sacred?

Is water sacred?

Something sacred is something special, something set apart. It is a high standard, reserved for only those things central to our lives and culture. Faith is sacred. Life is sacred. These are clear. But what about something more mundane, more ordinary? What about water? We use it all the time, even for the most menial tasks. Can it still be set apart? Can it, too, be sacred?

This is a brief look at those questions through the eyes of faith. This booklet is by no means an exhaustive account of the ways in which we use water or how it might be sacred. It is but a drop in a sea of information. But our hope is that this journey will give you many questions about water, some answers, and the desire to learn more about both. May this be but the beginning of the conversation.

THE ATTRACTION:

## How are you drawn to water?

Something about water simply calls to us. We're drawn to it. We seek it out. We want to be around it; to see it, to listen to it, to be in it. It calms us and relaxes us. It makes us new.

For Brian McLaren it's the upper Potomac. Every summer the Christian writer and former pastor spends a few days fishing and hiking along the river not too far from his Maryland home. "It has become truly holy ground for me, because I just love that river and all the life sustained by it," he says. "There's no cathedral that's more sacred to me than that beautiful space."

For Kunwar Bhatnagar, the Ganges in his native India is the great holy river. "When you take a pilgrimage to the Ganges, you meet holy people," the retired University of Louisville professor of anatomy and member of the Hindu Temple of Kentucky explains. "And I was there. You have an internal sense of spirituality, which cannot be explained by words or by any other means."

Louisville Rabbi Joe Rooks Rapport also grew up worshipping near the water, in a hand-built synagogue in the woods, on a cliff overlooking Lake Superior. "When I go home, when I meditate, when I think of myself returning to the roots of my beginnings spiritually,"

he says, "I always go back to that place, that cliff, that lake. That's sort of a touchstone... of the heightened spiritual awareness that led me to the rabbinism, that led me to my involvement in my religious faith."

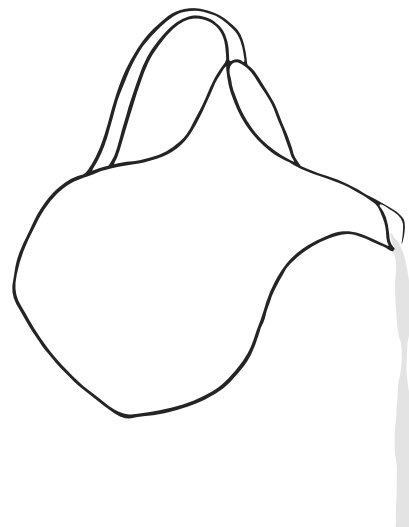
Father John Rausch likes to swim in Indian Creek, a tributary of the Rockcastle River in southeastern Kentucky. The priest, writer, and director of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia goes to a spot where a boulder sits in the path of the water and causes it to pool into a small pond. On hot days, with the water and the woods around him, he swims and thanks God for the beauty. "Water caresses you," he says. "It's like air. It's all around you. And when you're in a body of water, you can bob up and down or float...perhaps you're reminded of your time in the womb where you were surrounded by water."

In a way, the entire planet is in the womb. Christiana Peppard points out that the saline content of amniotic fluid is the same as that of the ocean. Peppard is a Yale doctoral student and religious ethicist, writing her dissertation how Western society values fresh water. She likes to look out at the horizon, where the sky and water meet, "where they bleed together, where they become indistinct, where they seem almost to be one." It brings to her mind the Genesis account where

God separates the waters above from the waters below, with the sky in between. “I think that that’s incredibly powerful and poignant,” she says, “being encircled by water and being held ... in creation by it.”

Father Joe Mitchell also explains our attraction to water in spiritual terms. Mitchell is the founder and head of the Passi-nists’ Earth and Spirit Center in Louisville, whose goal is to bring faith into the campaign for the Earth’s future. He sees water as one of the many “manifestations of divine presence,” inherent in the natural world God created. Mitchell paraphrases Sir Thomas Aquinas: “Because the divine could not manifest itself forth in any one form, it created a multiplicity of forms, so that what was lacking in one would be made up by the others, and the whole creation would manifest God more than any one creature could.”

Of course, our water draws us in an even more fundamental way: We can live for days without food, but not without water. Only breathing is more urgent.



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**“Something about water  
simply calls to us.”**

OUR DAILY WATER:

## How often do you use water?

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Think for a moment about water's role in your typical morning routine.

You start the day by rolling out of bed and ambling to the bathroom. Your mouth is dry, depleted of its water-based saliva after several hours without anything to drink. You flip on the light and deposit the remains of your last liquid consumption into a bowl filled with treated water. When flushed, it goes away, replaced by a bowl of clean water.

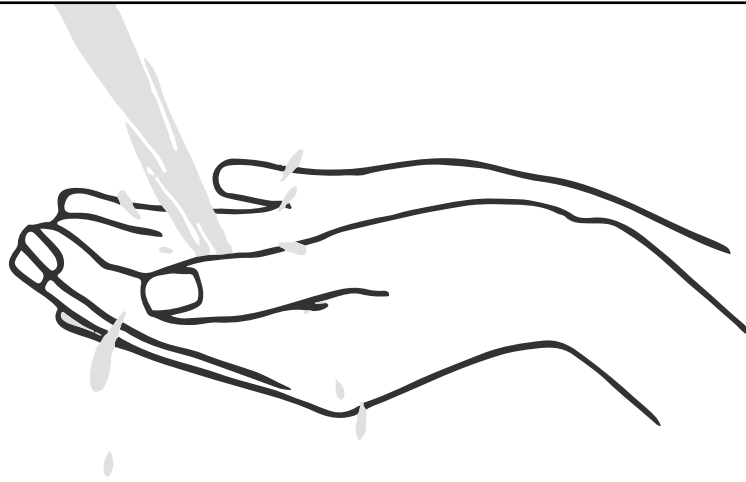
You then clean your body in a shower of hot water. The clean water comes from above and the dirty water disappears below. Water is good for cleaning, because it dissolves just about anything and carries it off in small pieces. After 10 or 15 minutes and 20 or 30 gallons, you're satisfactorily clean. You turn off the water, dry off, and get dressed. Yesterday's dirty clothes go into the laundry basket to be washed later in the week. You then walk to the kitchen refreshed and ready to begin your day.

You fix yourself a bowl of cereal or a piece of toast, made from crops grown with water. Whatever you wash it down with—milk, tea, or coffee—you're primarily drinking water. You were thirsty after several hours without anything to drink, and you feel better now. The saliva returns to your mouth, and your tongue perks up like a saguaro cactus after spring rain. Finishing your breakfast, you put your dishes in dishwasher, brush your teeth with water, and head out the door.

Although these events are small and mundane, they are not insignificant. Every morning, and indeed at all hours of the day, you interact with water in ways that change you and change your water. In each part of your morning routine, water has nourished and refreshed you. You would notice the absence of any one of these water-related tasks. And each of your actions is like a vote for how water is used and treated in our world.

“Every morning, you interact with water in ways that change you and change your water.”

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WATER AND FAITHS:

## What does your faith say about water?

In the book of Genesis - the starting point for Jews and Christians - there is no separate day for the creation of water. It's simply there, even before God says "let there be light." In fact, water was all there was. The Earth was "void and formless," the book says, and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters of the deep.

During the week-long Creation, God formed the water into clouds and gathered the seas in one place and the land in another. The land was watered by springs, and God filled the land and the waters with living creatures. A river flowed through the Garden of Eden, where God formed the first man out of the dust of the ground.

In the Qur'an, God formed all living things out of water, and indeed your body needs so much water-around four pounds a day because by volume it mostly is water. Take the hands holding this booklet. The blood coursing through your veins is almost entirely water. The muscles moving your fingers and the skin around them are mostly water. The cartilage cushioning your finger joints is mostly water. Even your bones contain a significant portion of water. Without water, "you'd be a handful of dust" even now, observes Father Mitchell.

Precisely because water is the source of all life, it is considered sacred

in Islam, says Mohammad Faghfoory, a professor in the Department of Religion at The George Washington University. Water is also sacred, he says, because "it is pure and ... it has a purifying effect." In other words, we rely on water not just to keep the dust of our body together, but also to keep our bodies clean of the dust.

Water's power to make clean is vital to many religious cleansing rituals. Kunwar Bhatnagar explains that in Hinduism, "Every worship service utilizes water. Water is used for building the deity... and for general cleanliness---external cleanliness as well as cleanliness of the mind internal." It is this quest for the physical and spiritual cleanliness bestowed by water that leads Hindus to make pilgrimages to bathe in sacred rivers.

Likewise, Mohammad Faghfoory says that "every act of worship in Islam starts with ablution." He explains that "each and every [ablution] is, in fact, quite a spiritual experience, because it is assumed that by purifying your body, you are going to stand before God." Muslims perform lesser ablutions before each daily prayer by washing specific parts of the body such as the hands, head, and feet. In a similar fashion, many Catholics dip their fingers in holy water on the way into mass. "When you go into the house of God, you want to bless yourself



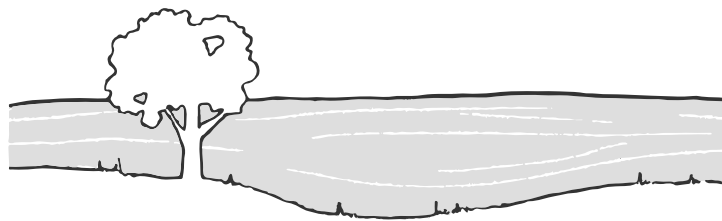
and you want to release from your mind those things that are pulling you down and allow yourself to be in the presence of God,” Father Rausch explains.

Muslims perform greater ablutions—washing the body from head to toe—following specific events such as conversion to the faith or participation in the various stages of the human life cycle. Similar events regularly lead many Jews to practice ritual immersion in sacred water, says Rabbi Rooks Rapport. In the practice known as mikvah, the participant is immersed in water from a constantly renewed natural source. Everything that would get in the way of contact with this “living water” is removed, from clothes to makeup to nail polish. Then, with the aid of a rabbi or rabbi’s spouse, the person repeatedly is repeatedly submerged in the water while reciting prayers specific to the occasion.

In one Gospel story, Jesus gave a new twist to the notion of “living water,” saying, “whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” Indeed, Christian baptism has its roots in mikvah. Brian McLaren explains that baptism began with a Jewish prophet called John the Baptist. John made his name by leading the repentant to leave behind their sinful lives and be made new through baptism, and Jesus himself began his three-year ministry by being baptized by John in the Jordan River.

Baptism soon became an initiation ritual into the Christian faith. Though not all baptisms are done by immersion (many involve pouring or sprinkling water on the head of the baptized), they all symbolize the washing away of one’s sins and old self. “Through baptism, we become a new creation,” says Father Rausch. “The old ways of greed and indifference are gone. The new creation is a whole life where you look after one another.”



**“The blood coursing through your veins is almost entirely water.”**

WATER IN OUR WORLD:

## What is your impact on water?

What is your impact on water?

As fundamental as water is to our existence, our health, and our faith, many of us have trouble answering some of the most basic questions about it: Where did it come from? What happened to it along the way? And what's in it?

Within a single cycle, most of our water comes to us from rain. When it rains, part of the water percolates below the surface, where it replenishes underground reservoirs. These underground aquifers can be tapped with pumps and wells to provide drinking water. Some of the rain runs off our roads and our roofs into streams. Sometimes these streams are dammed up to form above-ground reservoirs, which can serve as water sources in areas without natural bodies of water. Other streams run into rivers and eventually out to the sea. Along the way, these rivers run through serene rural areas and busy urban ones. River cities often get their water from their rivers, drawing it through pipes, processing it in large facilities, and distributing it throughout the metropolitan region. When used, the water is returned to the ground, the air, or the watershed.

Such is the water cycle. It is one of the ancient cycles of the earth: always changing; always rising and falling, flowing or freezing; always returning. In this way, all water flows to us from the beginning of time.

Water is one of the original renewable resources. When used, it comes back; when sullied, it becomes clean again. But in the last century, this has changed. At various stages along its journey from cloud to cup and back again, our water collects small pieces of our world: eroded soil from our fields and construction sites; coolant or brake fluid from our cars; pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers from our yards and farms; wastewater from our sewers; chemicals from our factories; and toxic sludge from our coal mines and power plants. Some of these toxins make it through our water treatment process. And some come out in our rain.

“We’ve polluted the water cycle,” says Kentucky author Wendell Berry. “How many miles of streams in Kentucky are fit to swim in or eat fish from? I don’t think there’s any.” His indictment is all the more potent because Kentucky has more miles of running water than any state but Alaska.

Waterways are in the same trouble across the globe. If Jesus were baptized at the same spot in the Jordan River today, he would either be wading in sewage or standing on a dry bed. Similar problems plague the Ganges after it passes through India’s industrial centers. The many pilgrims who travel to bathe in these rivers likely do not realize how sick the waters can be.

How does this happen? There are the obvious sources of water degradation: the proverbial polluting factory or municipal sewage system that let untreated waste into rivers, streams, and aquifers.

But many of us become parties to water degradation without even trying to. For example, much of our food is grown with nitrogen fertilizers, which run off into the water, leading to a condition known as “hypoxia”: algae gorge themselves on the surplus nutrients, blooming until they have sucked loose oxygen out of the water, rendering it paradoxically incapable of sustaining life.

We’re also putting chemicals into our water, often without knowing it. When we ingest pharmaceuticals, the chemicals pass through our bodies and into our water, and some people even dispose of unwanted drugs by flushing them. Combined with the chemicals discharged by pharmaceutical manufacturers, we have changed the chemistry of our water. We have just begun to grasp the consequences of what this means for our health.

And then there is electricity. “To have the light switch, which we all have to have now to live, we suffer our land and water to be degraded,” says Wendell Berry. Coal strip mines, he says, have made the Kentucky River where he lives “unhealthy.”

Strip-mining, which is also called mountain-top removal, involves getting at coal by blowing up and removing everything on top of it. Often, this debris is dumped into an adjacent valley, wiping its streams off the map forever. Streams that aren’t filled in still suffer from toxic sludge, a coal by-product which carries high levels of heavy metals. These harmful substances can contaminate our drinking water and cause an increased risk of cancer and birth defects.

In the Third World, the lack of clean drinking water can be even more dire. “So many hospital beds in the world are being filled because of water-related disease, very preventable disease,” says Stan Paryrak of the non-profit Living Water International. “It’s just a constant day-to-day for about 800, 840 million people.” Paryrak and his colleagues work to provide affordable clean water to people in need. Their job has gotten more difficult as global population increases, wasteful water practices, and climate change have combined to put a strain on many fresh water supplies.

The increasing scarcity of freshwater, says Paryrak, has led some to suggest that water may be “the new oil,” with wars fought over its control. Indeed, even in the United States, water fights are being waged in the courts, with increasingly worried states trying to lock up the rights to as much water as they can.

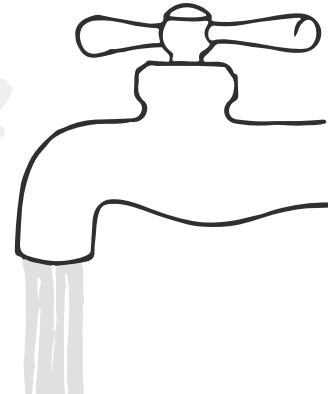
RESTORING OUR WATER'S HEALTH:

## How do our faiths respond?

Ruined water ruins us. Water never goes away. It merely goes somewhere else. Anything put into water goes along with it unless removed. And it quite literally becomes part of us. We cannot separate water or its care from ourselves or anything we do.

Our waters are liquid threads weaving our planet together: all people, all faiths, all actions. Caring for it, then, will require more than “being careful at the business end of the faucet,” to use Wendell Berry’s phrasing. It will require seeing how we are connected to the health of our water in all aspects of our lives.

The challenges facing water are as difficult as they are important. While many people of faith have been working diligently on water crises—pollution, contamination, scarcity—much remains to be done. It is work that begins each morning in each of our homes and permeates choices we make throughout every day. Many of these water issues can only be tackled through collective action. And still others have likely yet to be perceived; we will become aware of them only with a greater awareness of our water.



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**“Our waters are liquid threads weaving our planet together: all people, all faiths, all actions.”**

It is our hope that the **Festival of Faiths** in Louisville, a city birthed and continually fed by the Ohio River, will lead you, your family, and your house of worship to better understand the role of water in your lives. Our aim is to inspire you to ask: what does it mean to care for our water? We will seek to answer this question from our many faiths with one voice, that together we may bring new life to our water – one of the few sacred things none of us can live without.

*Written by*  
Eric Burnette  
for the Festival of Faiths  
in Louisville, Kentucky

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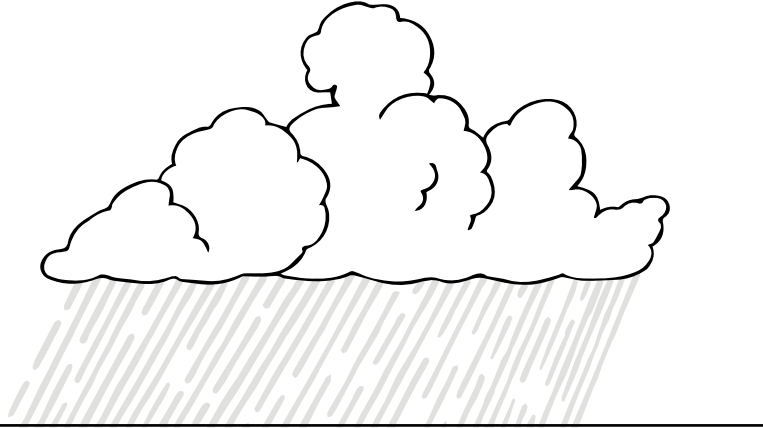
*Graphic design by*  
Ty Kreft

*Illustration by*  
Amanda Bishop

*[www.ajbmtk.com](http://www.ajbmtk.com)*

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To learn more about the  
Festival of Faiths, please visit  
*[www.interfaithrelations.org](http://www.interfaithrelations.org)*



“Something sacred is something special, something set apart.”

## Tool Kit Introduction

This year, the Festival of Faiths has created for the first time a Tool Kit for use in facilitating on-going dialogue on *Sacred Water: Sustaining Life*. To that end, a DVD of the documentary FLOW has been provided, along with study questions that might stimulate discussion. Other materials include statements from prominent secular and religious leaders on the necessity for respecting water as a sacred and sustaining resource that must be made universally available to all human beings as a right. Selected facts are provided on the availability of water and on its use and abuse worldwide, along with a limited bibliography that includes websites and curriculum resources as well as books and articles. The goal is to offer a broad range of resources on the complex issues relating to water in order to promote the awareness and commitment that are prologue to action leading to the universal embrace of peoples of all faiths who care for the spiritual and temporal welfare of each other.

The collective materials for the Tool Kit constitute Volume I of a projected two-part work. Volume II will appear several months after the Festival of Faiths as a summary of presentations made and events that took place. The Festival welcomes your comments and critiques on these subjects for inclusion in Volume II. Most of all, the Festival urges you to report on discussions that you have initiated to continue the dialogue on *Sacred Water: Sustaining Life* in your homes, churches or other venues. Please submit your comments at [foftoolkit@poplarterrace.com](mailto:foftoolkit@poplarterrace.com). If Volume I leads us to the shores of *Sacred Water: Sustaining Life*, it is hoped that Volume II will “flow” from this source as a sparkling stream that nourishes and revivifies the mind while it refreshes the soul.



## Center for Interfaith Relations (CIR)

The Center for Interfaith Relations encourages people to gather, contemplate, converse, and learn about their religious neighbors. By bringing together communities of faith, the Center promotes and supports interreligious understanding, cooperation, and action on significant issues facing the lives of all of the people. The fabric of the community is strengthened because the Center establishes connections between members of different religious traditions, recognizing commonalities and celebrating differences among faiths.

## Festival of Faiths

The Festival of Faiths is the culminating annual achievement of the Center for Interfaith Relations (CIR), a nonsectarian organization dedicated to promoting and supporting interfaith understanding, cooperation, and action. In a world in which religious differences have provoked widespread hatred and violence, the Festival issues a rare and special invitation to diverse faith communities to come together to celebrate our sacred earth and its waters. The permanent goal of CIR in bringing the Festival of Faiths to this community and beyond is to promote within each person the love for all human beings that celebrates their diversity and their uniqueness. Thomas Merton demonstrated what such love leads to when he envisioned, in downtown Louisville, a pageant of humanity, walking about, “shining like the sun.”

The theme of this year’s Festival, “Sacred Water: Sustaining Life” is particularly appropriate for interfaith discussion and reflection as water has long been a sacred symbol in world religions, and it sustains all life.

“Religious communities are, without question, the largest and best-organized civil institutions in the world today, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and bridging the divides of race, class, and nationality. They are uniquely equipped to meet the challenges of our time: resolving conflicts, caring for the earth, the sick and needy, and promoting peaceful co-existence among all peoples.”

— Religions for Peace —

## Study Questions to Accompany the Documentary FLOW

1. Robert Redford, a long-time, knowledgeable environmentalist, has called the global water crisis “the greatest threat of our time.” Ponder this astonishing statement in the light of some of the issues raised in FLOW, such as the problem of water-borne diseases, water scarcity, pollution, and privatization. What are you, your friends, your community of faith prepared to do to raise consciousness of the water crisis of today?
2. Early in the film, FLOW, the statement is made that some of the tap water in the US contains rocket fuel. What does this tell us about regulation and inspection practices in our nation? Who or what is accountable for this situation? What responsibilities do concerned citizens have in this matter?
3. FLOW presents a beautiful image of water flowing through the veins and arteries of our planet as well as of our bodies, the microcosm and the macrocosm drawing life from the same source. Yet, there is another implication from this image that demands attention. Because of the unifying stream of water from the planet to our bodies and then back to the planet, what we put into our bodies, we put into the planet, and conversely, what we put into our planet, we put into our bodies. In this sense, “we all live downstream” from whatever goes into our bodily and planetary veins and arteries. To what conclusions do these considerations lead you regarding the appropriate use of water by you as well as by corporations?
4. Several episodes in FLOW depict women and children walking long distances to seek water, and then making the long trek home, carrying heavy containers of water on their heads. What responsibilities do we have to our fellow human beings in their severe hardship? What responsibilities do we have to the environment so as to make it more nurturing of life worldwide?

5. FLOW demonstrates a number of startling consequences resulting from water pollution, but one that is particularly memorable is the sex-change observed in some fish as a result of ingesting water laced with waste from birth-control medication. What recommendations would you make to address this situation?

6. Examine the spiritual cosmology of the Indian in FLOW, who could never think of himself as owning the “sparkle” of the water or the sacred earth, which is Mother to the Red men and women. He claims that the White race does not understand this Indian view. What can persons who are not members of the Red race learn from the spirituality of the Indian? Is there anything that the Indian could learn from those who are not Red? How can all of us of different faith communions enrich each other by becoming advocates for global water rights?

7. Solutions to problems of water scarcity or pollution demonstrated in FLOW invariably come from local people, either against or in the absence of large corporations. Protests in Bolivia, in Michigan, and in India have proven to be effective. Individuals in India have developed low-budget solutions to water problems within a limited sphere. The World Bank is criticized for its irrelevancy in its ability to deal with billion-dollar projects, as opposed to more necessary \$1,000 projects in a million places. The conclusion emerging from these observations is that solutions to the water crisis of our day depend upon the involvement of small, local groups rather than governments or corporations. What are you prepared to do to empower such groups? How can you strengthen your support through advocacy within your own network?

8. Water scarcity has attracted great interest in privatization among entrepreneurs who see a large demand for a dwindling supply of a necessary commodity, often among the most impoverished people on Earth. FLOW takes an adversarial view toward privatization, because it adopts the premise that potable water is a basic human right, and safeguarding it is the global civil rights issue of the 21st century. Do you think that your community of faith, school, friends support this position? Are you prepared to expand support for this position by soliciting signatures among those in your network for the Amendment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, recommended by FLOW?

9. Fish are not the only victims of pollution. Men suffer increased risk to prostate cancer, a reduced sperm count and development of female characteristics because of their exposure to Atrazine, a product manufactured in Switzerland but banned in the European Union. It is used in the US, 80 million tons of it, making American men particularly vulnerable. One-half million tons come back in rain water, polluting fields and streams beneath, and everything that lives and grows in them. When does the demand for regulation in the interest of health and safety become a moral imperative? How can citizen outrage best be voiced so that it makes its point but keeps civil discourse leading to action going?

10. Robert Redford, as mentioned in the first question, called the global water crisis the greatest threat of our time. Others have likened the water crisis to that of oil, so desperately needed that it will bring on violence and even wars among competitors. Do you think that we will deal successfully with the threat brought on by water problems? What would you describe as a successful outcome? In your description, what part is played by protecting the right to water over privatization? Should we not be successful in dealing with the problem, do you foresee nations at war? The sixth great mass extinction?

11. Even though the overall mood of FLOW is optimistic, its language becomes at times apocalyptic, as when it foresees a possible migration toward the sixth great extinction, the fifth having been that of the dinosaurs. This vision is brought on by the recognition that some of the mighty rivers of the world no longer reach their mouths, the Nile, Yellow and Colorado Rivers being examples. What is in store for sections of Egypt and China, for California, Arizona, and Florida, all of which are running out of water? Given the scarcity of water and the significant population increase in the hardest stricken areas, is it possible that certain nations are simply hopeless? That even under improved conditions, they cannot produce enough food or clean water to sustain the life of their people? In the face of resources so inadequate that they cannot sustain the local population, what are the responsibilities of the people who have more than they need?

12. For the past century, dams have been proposed worldwide as a solution to water problems. Yet, dams play a large part in the problems of scarcity and pollution. Not only do dams displace local populations, they sometimes divert rivers to the

point that they run out of water before they reach their mouths. At the same time, they destroy eco-systems in the rivers and can produce more methane gas than coal does. What would it take to reverse a well established mindset that assumes that big problems demand big solutions and to embrace instead the notion of providing millions of small water purifying systems such as the one in India that is shown in FLOW?

13. The United Nations has set as a goal for 2015 reducing by one-half the number of people without access to clean water. What are you prepared to do to see to it that the UN meets, or even exceeds, its goal? How will you involve your faith community or other groups of which you are a member?

14. Bottled water is one of the obscenities of our day. It drains valuable natural resources, creates problems of waste disposal, produces misleading advertising, and is outrageously priced. Yet, the industry is estimated at \$100 billion worldwide, a sum that could fund the provision of clean water for all. The episode in FLOW which recounted the Nestle experience in Michigan suggested that while the laws of the land favor the industry, the power of the people when they become organized can accomplish what the courts cannot. What cause pertaining to clean water does this episode inspire you to support? How would you engage your community of faith or other group to join in support of your cause?

15. The commitment to address the global water crisis comes down to determining who we are and how we see our purpose in life. This commitment is more than a march in the street, although FLOW affirms the efficacy of such activism. It takes us on an interior journey toward perfection or sanctification. How can we emerge as a better persons of faith as a result of committing ourselves to doing all that we can to solve the global water crisis?

## Sacred Water and the World's Religions

With thanks to

<http://www.pureinsideout.com/water-myths-mysteries-and-symbolism.html>

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To speak of the sacred is to acknowledge the presence of the divine in our world. The language of the sacred is necessarily that of symbols because they alone can point to realities that cannot be expressed in ordinary discourse. These realities are transcendent, and can be glimpsed but never exhausted. Water as a symbol of sacred mystery survives from an archaic past, and has long allowed human beings to speak of the divine origin of life, of purification from sin, and of salvation. Life is never the same for those whose souls have been touched with a vision of mystery. The new life to which this experience leads is symbolized through the cleansing waters which wash away the defilement of the past, generating a more pure life of mind and soul. Jesus used the symbol of water to speak of this new life when He told the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well that no one is ever again thirsty after having drunk of the living water, or eternal life, that He shall give (Jn. 4:14).

Accounts of manifestations of the divine through water appear repeatedly in the Hebrew and New Testaments. Yahweh provided water for the Israelites in the desert and parted the waters of the Red Sea to liberate them from the pursuing Egyptians, who perished in these same waters. Jesus' first miracle was performed at Cana, where He changed water into wine. Accounts of manifestations of the divine through floods occur in Genesis, but also in the Hindu scriptures, as well as in the religious traditions of the Australian Aborigines and some Pacific islanders. While the differences among the societies that affirm such manifestations are apparent, the far more important point is in their similarities. All of these societies have been able to live in what Mircea Eliade calls a "sacralized cosmos" because they have been able to speak of the mighty presence of the divine through the familiar symbol of water.

While water as symbol has long spoken of the sacred in the world, in itself it has always been recognized as necessary to life. In water, the natural and the supernatural abide in the same substance, each validating the other. Water sustains life in time, and symbolic water sustains life in eternity. Given the powerful significance attached to water, it is not surprising that it has played and continues to play an important role in ceremonies of the major religions of the world. Through the use of water, these

ceremonies are able to give expression to beliefs concerning life and death, and to regeneration after death. So ancient and so widespread is the story that all life came forth from water that it seems to be common property that world religions have inherited from the past. Water as ablution universally symbolizes the cleansing of the individual, but as flood, water is the destroyer that also cleanses the entire world so that it might begin anew, refreshed and restored to its pristine purity.

Rivers, rain, ponds, lakes, glaciers, hailstorms, or snow are some of the forms water may take when interpreted and incorporated in cultural and religious spheres. Religious water is never neutral and passive. It is considered to have powers and capacities to transform this world, annihilate sins, and create holiness. Water carries away pollution and purifies both in a physical and symbolical sense. Water is a living and spiritual matter, and as such, the point at which the temporal and the eternal intersect.

## World Religions (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

It is instructive as well as inspiring for all people of faith to reflect upon the ceremonial uses of water in diverse religious rituals, because each contributes in characteristic ways to a deepened awareness of the sacred realities of life, death, and regeneration. Unfortunately, our limited experience does not allow us to be all inclusive in illustrating the role of water in religious ceremonies.

**Baha'i:** A good place to begin our reflection, limited though it may be, is with the Baha'i prayer, which acknowledges water as divine gift: "The Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man's thirst, but its use is dependent upon His Will. If it should not be in conformity with His Will, man is afflicted with a thirst which the oceans cannot quench." The prayer urges a reverence for water as a gift of the Creator, as well as an abandonment of self to the divine Will. This abandonment is a participation in the divine life itself.

**Buddhist:** The lotus-stream of the Buddha (Boddhisattva) rises up from the waters of the soul, in the same way the spirit, illumined by knowledge, frees itself from passive existence. Water is used in Buddhist funerals. It is poured and overflows into a bowl placed before the monks and the dead body. As it fills and pours over the edge, the monks recite, 'As the rains fill the rivers and overflow into the ocean, so likewise may what is given here reach the departed.'



**Christian:** In Christianity, baptism links the concept of the water of life with the water of purification. Water is intrinsically linked to baptism, a public declaration of faith and a sign of welcome into the Christian church. When baptized, one is fully or partially immersed in water, or one's head may simply be sprinkled with a few drops of water which symbolizes purification and the cleansing of the original sin. The sacrament has its roots in the Gospel, wherein it is written that Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan. In the New Testament, 'living water' or 'water of life' represents the spirit of God, that is, eternal life.

**Hindu:** The holy books of the Hindus explain that all the inhabitants of the earth emerged from the primordial sea. Water is imbued with powers of spiritual purification for Hindus, for whom morning cleansing with water is an everyday obligation. All temples are located near a water source, and followers must bathe before entering the temple. Many pilgrimage sites are found on river banks; sites where two, or even three, rivers converge are considered particularly sacred. In India, the sacred River Ganges embodies the water of life for Hindus. Legend has it that the Ganges is the river that flows beyond its earthly bounds to Moksa, the realm of Nirvana.

**Islam:** The Holy Koran cites the words "We have created every living thing from water." When the prophet Mohamed was asked what was the most praiseworthy deed, he answered, "To give water to drink." For Muslims, water serves above and beyond all for purification. There are three sorts of ablutions: The first and most important involves washing the whole body; it is obligatory after sex, and recommended before the Friday prayers and before touching the Holy Koran. Before each of the five daily prayers, Muslims must bathe their heads, wash their hands, forearms, and feet. All mosques provide a water source, usually a fountain, for this ablution. When water is scarce, followers of Islam use sand to cleanse themselves; this is the third form of ablution.

**Judaism:** Jews use water for ritual cleansing to restore or maintain a state of purity. Hand-washing before and after meals is obligatory. Although ritual baths, or mikveh, were once extremely important in Jewish communities, they are less so now; they remain, however, compulsory for converts. Men attend mikveh on Fridays and before large celebrations; women before their wedding, after giving birth, and after menstruation.

**Shinto:** Shinto is Japan's indigenous religion and is based on the veneration of the kami, innumerable deities believed to inhabit nature. Worship of the kami must always begin by a ritual of purification with water. This act restores order and balance between nature, humans and the deities. Inside the many sacred shrines, troughs for ritual washing are placed. Waterfalls are held sacred and standing under them is believed to purify.

**Eco Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches...**  
**WATER THE KEY TO SUSTAINING LIFE:**  
**AN OPEN STATEMENT TO GOVERNING BODIES AND CONCERNED CITIZENS**

Water is a vital ingredient for both the diversity of life on Earth and for human well-being. As people of faith, we are stewards and caretakers of God's wondrous creation. As we become aware of threats to God's precious waters, we must respond with action. We must hold accountable those people in positions of power for the decisions they make regarding our health, well-being, and continued opportunity for a quality life.

The conservation and protection of clean and safe water is just one of the many critical issues that is constantly confronting us and threatening the quality of life for future generations. Water sustains life not only for humans, but for all of creation. Water is a fundamental component of the world's eco-systems and ensures a rich diversity of plant and animal life. It is our religious responsibility to preserve fragile ecosystems in wetlands, creeks, and other riparian habitats.

Water should be viewed as a gift from God for all people, not a commodity that can be traded for profit. Access to fresh water supplies is becoming an urgent matter of life and death across the planet and especially for the 1.2 billion people who are currently suffering from a lack of adequate water and sanitation. The world is on the verge of a serious water crisis—one that is leading to conflicts among people, communities, regions, and nations. All individuals have the fundamental right to clean water and no one should be denied access to clean water because they cannot afford it.

As a world leader, we need to set a standard and example on how to preserve what we have and prepare for the future. We need to protect God's waters and guide others by responsibly conserving, preserving, and distributing this priceless and necessary part of God's creation. From the bays, lakes, rivers and streams to the Great Lakes and to the ocean shores, conservation and protection should be a priority.

For people of faith, water is an essential element of both our physical and spiritual life. We understand water as a symbol of preservation, cleansing, and renewal. Water is an integral part of the sacrament of Baptism. In Genesis, wells were built near altars to remind those that passed by of God's provision. Moses repeatedly used water when he performed miracles in God's name in his effort to free the Hebrews from Pharaoh's bondage. In John chapter four, Jesus converses with a Samaritan woman at a well as she draws water. He explains to her about "living water," which if she drinks, "will never thirst again."

Given the profound religious symbolism of water and our responsibility as stewards of God's creation, we call on all levels of leadership – community leaders, elected officials, business and industry leaders – to partner with us to protect the sacred gift of clean water. Our leaders have the responsibility to continue to create and enforce laws that protect this necessary ingredient for life. Industry leaders and elected officials need to ensure that strict laws and tough regulations are in place to control pollution discharge into waterways from industrial and agricultural facilities. States have the responsibility to protect their local aquifers, watersheds, creeks and lakes from pollutants that can contaminate water, deforestation that destroys eco-systems, and organizations that strive for the privatization of water. Communities have the responsibility to protect the necessary human right to clean water as well as to preserve that right for future generations.

People of faith have the responsibility to protect all of God's creation, the gifts that God so abundantly provided.

## Eco Justice Working Group of the National Council of Churches Signees

Simone Campbell, SSS  
National Coordinator, NETWORK

The Right Reverend Vicken Aykazian  
Legate of the Armenian Church

The Reverend Dr. Robert Edgar General  
Secretary, National Council of Churches of  
Christ, USA

The Most Reverend Frank T. Griswold  
Presiding Bishop and Primate  
The Episcopal Church, USA

The Reverend Dr. Stan Hastey  
Executive Director, Alliance of Baptists

The Reverend William Chris Hobgood  
General Minister and President  
The Christian Church, (Disciples of Christ)  
in the United States and Canada

The Reverend Michael Livingston  
Executive Director, International Council  
of Community Churches

Marie Lucey, OSF  
Associate Director for Social Mission  
Leadership Conference on Women  
Religious

Rabbi Janet Marder  
President  
Central Conference of American Rabbis

Stanley J. Noffsinger  
General Secretary  
Church of the Brethren General Board

The Reverend Dr. Lon Oliver  
Associate Regional Minister  
Kentucky Appalachian Ministry

Sister Robbie Pentecost, OSF  
Executive Director  
Catholic Committee of Appalachia

Rosanne Rustemeyer, SSND  
Executive Director  
U.S. Catholic Mission Association

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director, Religious Action Center on  
Reform Judaism

Adam C. Stern  
Executive Director, Coalition on the  
Environment and Jewish Life

School Sisters of Notre Dame  
Office of Justice, Peace & Integrity  
of Creation

The Reverend John H. Thomas  
General Minister and President  
United Church of Christ

Reva Price  
Director, Jewish Council of Public Affairs

Joe Volk  
Executive Secretary, Friends Committee  
on National Legislation (A Quaker Lobby  
in the Public Interest)

## Quotes on Water from World Leaders, Institutions, and Groups

“Earth provides enough to satisfy every \*person’s+ need, but not every \*person’s+ greed.” — *Mahatma Gandhi*

“There is an old African proverb: “If you want to go quickly, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.” We have to go far, quickly.” — *Al Gore*

“When the well is dry, we know the worth of water.” — *Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard’s Almanac, 1746*

“No one has the right to use America’s rivers and America’s waterways, that belong to all the people, as a sewer. The banks of a river may belong to one man or one industry or one state, but the waters which flow between the banks should belong to all the people.” — *President Lyndon B. Johnson, upon signing the Clean Water Act of 1965*

“Let every individual and institution now think and act as a responsible trustee of Earth, seeking choices in ecology, economics and ethics that will provide a sustainable future, eliminate pollution, poverty and violence, awaken the wonder of life and foster peaceful progress in the human adventure.” — *John McConnell, founder of International Earth Day*

“Perhaps reluctantly we come to acknowledge that there are also scars which mark the surface of our Earth—erosion, deforestation, the squandering of the world’s mineral and ocean resources in order to fuel an insatiable consumption.” — *Pope Benedict XVI, from a 2008 speech*

“Among the environmental trends undermining our future are shrinking forests, expanding deserts, falling water tables, collapsing fisheries, disappearing species, and rising temperatures. The temperature increases bring crop-withering heat waves, more-destructive storms, more-intense droughts, more forest fires, and, of course, ice melting. We are crossing natural thresholds that we cannot see and violating deadlines that we do not recognize.” — *Lester Brown, author of Plan B, v3.0*

“Water is a truly unifying element. We all need it; we all want it and more and more than anything else in the world, it is the one thing that connects us all.” — *Irena Salina, FLOW*

“More than one-half of the world’s major rivers are being seriously depleted and polluted, degrading and poisoning the surrounding ecosystems, thus threatening the health and livelihood of people who depend upon them for irrigation, drinking and industrial water.” — *Ismail Serageldin, Chairman of the World Commission on Water for the 21st Century- Water Forum, Netherlands*

“Water is essential for all dimensions of life. Over the past few decades, use of water has increased, and in many places, water availability is falling to crisis levels. More than eighty countries, with forty percent of the world’s population, are already facing water shortages, while by year 2020 the world’s population will double. The costs of water infrastructure have risen dramatically. The quality of water in rivers and underground has deteriorated, due to pollution by waste and contaminants from cities, industry, and agriculture. Ecosystems are being destroyed, sometimes permanently. Over one billion people lack safe water, and three billion lack sanitation; eighty per cent of infectious diseases are waterborne, killing millions of children each year.” — *World Bank Institute*

“Water and air, the two essential fluids on which all life depends, have become global garbage cans.” – and – “We forget that the water cycle and the life cycle are one.” — *Jacques Cousteau*

“There is intoxication in the waters of contemplation, whose mystery fascinated and delighted the first Cistercians and whose image found its way into the names of so many of those valley monasteries that stood in forests, on the banks of clean streams, among rocks alive with springs. These are the waters which the world does not know, because it prefers the water of bitterness and contradiction... These are the Waters of Siloe, that flow in silence.” — *Thomas Merton, The Waters of Siloe*

“Today the sacred lands where the Hopi live are being desecrated by \*people+ who seek coal and water from our soil [so that] they may create more power for... cities. This must not be allowed to continue for if it does, Mother Nature will react in such a way that almost all \*people+ will suffer the end of life as they now know it.” — *Indian Spirit, # 38*

“In the darkness, the river  
Has worn the country  
Into the form it is.  
The land is the water’s memory.  
It remembers in the light  
What was made in the dark.” — *Wendell Berry, Sabbaths 2002, “VI”*

“Water is essential for life. Yet many millions of people around the world face water shortages. Many millions of children die every year from water-borne diseases. And drought regularly afflicts some of the world’s poorest countries. The world needs to respond much better. We need to increase water efficiency, especially in agriculture. We need to free women and girls from the daily chore of hauling water, often over great distances. We must involve them in decision-making on water management. We need to make sanitation a priority. This is where progress is lagging most. And we must show that water resources need not be a source of conflict. Instead, they can be a catalyst for cooperation. Significant gains have been made. But a major effort is still required. That is why this year marks the beginning of the “Water for Life” Decade. Our goal is to meet the internationally agreed targets for water and sanitation by 2015, and to build the foundation for further progress in the years beyond. This is an urgent matter of human development, and human dignity. Together, we can provide safe, clean water to all the world’s people. The world’s water resources are our lifeline for survival and for sustainable development in the 21st century. Together, we must manage them better.” “Access to safe water is a fundamental human need and therefore a basic human right . . . We need to safeguard the global supply of healthy water to everyone to ensure everyone has access to it.” — *Kofi A. Annan*

“The crisis of our diminishing water resources is just as severe (if less obviously immediate) as any wartime crisis we have ever faced. Our survival is just as much at stake as it was at the time of Pearl Harbor, or the Argonne, or Gettysburg, or Saratoga.” — *Jim Wright, U.S. Representative, The Coming Water Famine, 1966*

“Children of a culture born in a water-rich environment, we have never really learned how important water is to us. We understand it, but we do not respect it.” — *William Ashworth, Nor Any Drop to Drink, 1982*

“High quality water is more than the dream of the conservationists, more than a political slogan; high quality water, in the right quantity at the right place at the right time, is essential to health, recreation, and economic growth.” — *Edmund S. Muskie, U.S. Senator, speech, 1 March 1966*

“When you put your hand in a flowing stream, you touch the last that has gone before and the first of what is still to come.” — *Leonardo da Vinci*

“Water is fluid, soft, and yielding. But water will wear away rock, which is rigid and cannot yield. As a rule, whatever is fluid, soft, and yielding will overcome whatever is rigid and hard. This is another paradox: what is soft is strong.” — *Lao-Tzu (600 B.C.)*

“Water, the Hub of Life.

Water is its mater and matrix, mother and medium.

Water is the most extraordinary substance!

Practically all its properties are anomolous,

which enabled life to use

it as building

material for its machinery.

Life is water dancing to the tune of solids. (1972) — *Albert Szent-Gyorgyi (Hungarian Biochemist, 1937 Nobel Prize for Medicine,)*

“Cleanliness is next to Godliness.” — *Old Hindu saying*

“A river seems a magic thing. A magic, moving, living part of the very earth itself.” — *Laura Gilpin, From The Rio Grande, 1949*

“If you could tomorrow morning make water clean in the world, you would have done, in one fell swoop, the best thing you could have done for improving human health by improving environmental quality.” — *William C. Clark, speech, Racine, Wisconsin, April 1988*

“I have never seen a river that I could not love. Moving water has a fascinating vitality. It has power and grace and associations. It has a thousand colors and a thousand shapes, yet it follows laws so definite that the tiniest streamlet is an exact replica of a great river.” — *Roderick Haig-Brown*

“We let a river shower its banks with a spirit that invades the people living there, and we protect that river, knowing that without its blessings the people have no source of soul.” — *Thomas Moore*

“When we save a river, we save a major part of an ecosystem, and we save ourselves as well because of our dependence--physical, economic, spiritual--on the water and its community of life.” — *Tim Palmer, The Wild and Scenic Rivers of America*

“All things are connected, like the blood that runs in your family. The water’s murmur is the voice of my father’s father. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. You must give to the rivers the kindness you would give to any brother.” — *Chief Seattle, 1854*



“By means of water, we give life to everything.” — *The Holy Koran, 21:30*

“Be praised, My Lord, through Sister Water, who is very useful, humble, precious, and pure.” — *St. Francis of Assisi*

“The quality of water and the quality of life in all its infinite forms are critical parts of the overall, ongoing health of this planet of ours, not just here in the Amazon, but everywhere... The hardest part of any big project is to begin. We have begun. We are underway. We have a passion. We want to make a difference.” — *Sir Peter Blake (1948-2001) -last journal entry before being murdered by pirates on the Amazon River*

“Rivers must have been the guides which conducted the footsteps of the first travelers. They are the constant lure, when they flow by our doors, to distant enterprise and adventure, and, by a natural impulse, the dwellers on their banks will at length accompany their currents to the lowlands of the globe, or explore at their invitation the interior of continents.” — *Henry David Thoreau*

“Where a spring rises or a water flows, there ought we to build altars and offer sacrifices.” — *Seneca, Roman philosopher*

“My soul is full of longing  
For the secret of the Sea,  
And the heart of the great ocean  
Sends a thrilling pulse through me.” — *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Secret of the Sea*

“Our bodies are molded rivers.” — *Novalis*

“In every glass of water we drink, some of the water has already passed through fishes, trees, bacteria, worms in the soil, and many other organisms, including people... Living systems cleanse water and make it fit, among other things, for human consumption.” — *Elliot A. Norse, Animal Extinctions*

“When time comes for us to again rejoin the infinite stream of water flowing to and from the great timeless ocean, our little drop-let of soulful water will once again flow with the endless stream.” — *William E. Marks, The Holy Order Of Water*

“Rain is grace; rain is the sky condescending to the earth; without rain, there would be no life.” — *John Updike*

“Take almost any path you please, and ten to one it carries you down in a dale, and leaves you there by a pool in the stream. There is magic in it. Let the most absent-minded of men be plunged in his deepest reveries--stand that man on his legs, set his feet a going, and he will infallibly lead you to water, if water there be in all that region. Should you ever be athirst in the great American desert, try this experiment, if your caravan happen to be supplied with a metaphysical professor. Yes, as everyone knows, meditation and water are wedded forever.” — *Herman Melville, Moby Dick*

“We can’t help being thirsty, moving toward the voice of water. Milk drinkers draw close to the mother. Muslims, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, shamans, everyone hears the intelligent sound and moves with thirst to meet it.” — *Jeladuddin Rumi (1207-1273)*

“The many-voiced song of the river echoed softly. Siddhartha looked into the river and saw many pictures in the flowing water. The river’s voice was sorrowful. It sang with yearning and sadness, flowing towards its goal... Siddhartha was now listening intently...to this song of a thousand voices ... then the great song of a thousand voices consisted of one word: Om -- Perfection .....From that hour Siddhartha ceased to fight against his destiny.” — *Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha*

“Ocean: A body of water occupying two-thirds of a world made for man - who has no gills.” — *Ambrose Bierce*

“When you look at that nature world it becomes an icon, it becomes a holy picture that speaks of the origins of the world. Almost every mythology sees the origins of life coming out of water. And, curiously, that’s true. It’s amusing that the origin of life out of water is in myths and then again, finally, in science, we find the same thing. It’s exactly so.” — *Joseph Campbell, The Hero’s Journey, p. 10*

“The frog does not drink up the pond in which he lives.” — *American Indian Saying*

“We have been quick to assume rights to use water but slow to recognize obligations to preserve and protect it... In short, we need a water ethic--a guide to right conduct in the face of complex decisions about natural systems we do not and cannot fully understand.” — *Sandra Postel, Last Oasis: Facing Water Scarcity*

“In the . . . United States, water flows uphill to money.” — *Glen Sanders*

“We call upon the waters that rim the earth, horizon to horizon, that flow in our rivers and streams, that fall upon our gardens and fields, and we ask that they teach us and show us the way.” — *Chinook Indian Blessing*

“In Scandinavian mythology, for example, the fountain of Mimir, source of hidden wisdom, lay under the roots of the great world tree and in Islamic culture fountains are found referred to in the Koran, in the garden called Paradise. In the Bible the passage: ‘It is done, I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely,’ reflects the importance that fountains symbolized to the writers.” — *Bryan R. Hirst, Fountains*

“The river moves from land to water to land, in and out of organisms, reminding us what native peoples have never forgotten: that you cannot separate the land from the water, or the people from the land.” — *Lynn Noel, Voyages: Canada’s Heritage Rivers*

“Water is fundamental for life and health. The human right to water is indispensable for leading a healthy life in human dignity. It is a pre-requisite to the realization of all other human rights.” — *The United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights*

— And last but not least —

“All the water that will ever be is right now.” — *National Geographic*

## Water Factoids

### GENERAL:

Water sustains all life on the planet.

If all the world's water were fit into a gallon jug, the fresh water available for us to use would equal only about one tablespoon.

The Pacific Institute estimates that consumers spend approximately \$100 billion per year for bottled water, even though high quality and low cost tap water is often available to them.

A corn field of one acre gives off 4,000 gallons of water per day in evaporation.

In addition, the products used daily by Americans and others in the developed world consume large quantities of water. For example, it has been estimated that producing a pound of chicken from start to finish requires 467 gallons of water. It takes about 6 gallons of water to grow a single serving of lettuce. More than 2,600 gallons is required to produce a single serving of steak.

A five-minute shower can consume between 25 to 50 gallons of water.

### LOCAL, STATE, and REGIONAL:

According to The Louisville Water Company, its average consumer uses 80 gallons of water per day.

Kentuckians may be surprised to discover that the Kentucky River's brown, muddy appearance is not its natural state. "Before World War II, the Kentucky River was usually clear for most of the year," according to Dr. Wilford Bladen, retired UK Professor and author of *The Geography of Kentucky*. The major source of pollution is the siltation resulting from mining along the Kentucky River and its eastern tributaries. Such brings about the collapse of the river's ecosystems, as habitats for aquatic insects and plants are lost. Fish and other aquatic life lose their food source, and sediment clogs the feeding and circulatory apparatus of mussels and other shellfish, as well as the gills of larger fish.

The Ohio River is 981 miles long, covers an area of 204,000 square miles, and carries the largest volume of water of the major tributaries of the Mississippi.

Mussels are the most endangered species in Kentucky. Mussels can live only in clean water, and their presence is an indicator of a healthy river. . . researchers are interested in the ability of mussels to eat bacteria without harm to themselves – an understanding of how mussels are able to do this could help humans do the same.

In the Central Appalachian Region, 470 mountain tops have been removed for coal, which has resulted in the pollution of 1,200 miles of streams.

#### **NATIONAL:**

It is unsafe to swim or fish in nearly 40 percent of U.S. rivers and streams.

A recent government survey showed that at least 36 states are anticipating local, regional, or statewide water shortages by 2013.

More than a third of the Western United States sits atop ground water that is being consumed faster than it is replenished.

The Mississippi River carries the mud of thirty states and two provinces 2,000 miles south to the delta and deposits 500 million tons of it there every year. The business of the Mississippi, which it will accomplish in time, is methodically to transport all of Illinois to the Gulf of Mexico. — Charles Kuralt

Greater water consumption has concentrated pesticides, fertilizers and other pollutants in the ever-diminishing supply of water. Polluted water sickens nearly 3.5 million Americans a year.

Americans drink more than one billion glasses of tap water per day.

#### **INTERNATIONAL:**

Half of the world's wetlands are gone, destroyed by irrigation and dams.

Some of the world's mighty rivers have been reduced to a trickle before they reach their mouths. The Colorado River is an example. Except for unusually high flood years, virtually the entire flow of the Colorado is diverted and used before reaching its mouth at the Upper Gulf of California (Sea of Cortez).

Nearly 97% of the world's water is salty or otherwise undrinkable. Another 2% is locked in ice caps and glaciers. Only 1% can be used for all agricultural, residential, manufacturing, community and personal needs. — Drinking Water Week

In the past 50 years, the world's water use has tripled.

The United Nations has warned for some years that water shortages will become one of the planet's most pressing problems, with one report estimating that four billion people – or two-thirds of the current global population – will be affected by 2050.

Fresh water is very unequally distributed. Today, about 1.6 billion people, or roughly 26 percent of the world's population, live in countries where water supplies are insufficient to meet basic human needs. Part of the problem is rapid population growth, but bad management of water resources, pollution, and climate change also play a large part.

Climate change, which can create extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and heat waves, will continue to impose serious challenges on water systems, according to a report published by the United Nations Environmental Program.

Today, one in six people on the planet, or one billion people, do not have access to clean, safe drinking water, and some 2.6 billion people do not have access to adequate sanitation systems. It has been estimated that eight million people die every year from a disease connected to water, or 15 people per minute.

The urgency of the current water shortage is demonstrated in the efforts that millions of women and children worldwide devote to obtaining water for their households. In Nicaragua, for example, this task consumes, on average, about six hours a day, obviating any opportunity for the education of females. The situation is much the same in Kenya, where women and young girls carry over 20 kg of water from sources over 7 km from their homes. Sadly, in some cases, the distant water sources are polluted.

Across much of northern India, a widespread drought, exacerbated by a late monsoon and the driest June in 83 years, has given rise to water wars among neighbors, as well as to prayers for rain. In the city of Bhopal in northern India, where violence over water has occurred, the population has increased from 100,000 to 1.8 million in the past 50 years. — Gethin Chamberlain, *The Observer*, 12 July 2009

By 2025, at least 3.5 billion people - about half the world's population - will live in areas without enough water for agriculture, industry, and human needs... Worldwide, water quality conditions appear to have degraded in almost all regions with intensive agriculture and in large urban and industrial areas. — World Resources Institute, October 2000

### **HISTORICAL:**

Some particular springs and wells have been believed to confer long life on those who drink their waters. In China, those who drank the water of the fountain at Pon Lai believed that they were blessed with 1,000 lives.

The search for a Fountain of Youth has sparked voyages of discovery, including that of the Spanish conquistador Ponce de Leon, who set out in 1513 on an expedition to find such a fountain in Florida.

Goddesses and nymphs were frequently associated with certain rivers by the Celts and Romans. The Shannon River was named after the goddess Sinann, and the Seine after Sequana.

The spring at Evian-les-Bains, on the southern side of Lake Geneva, was discovered in ancient times. The Roman emperor Flavius Claudius Jovianus visited the site in 363 CE. Today, water from this spring is marketed as “Evian.”

The Romans knew about the waters at San Pellegrino in northern Italy. Much later, Leonardo da Vinci visited the place, and later still, in 1848, a spa was established. In 1899, the bottling of the water began and continues to this day.

## Water-Related Suggested Resources

With many thanks to Christiana Peppard for her help in this section

\*denotes speakers at the 2009 Festival of Faiths

### Books and articles that deal explicitly with water and religion:

1. \*Some, Sobonfu. *The Spirit of Intimacy and Welcoming Spirit Home*.
2. Edwards, Dennis. *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*.
3. Johnson, Cait. *Earth, Water, Fire, and Air: Essential Ways of Connecting to Spirit*.
4. Chamberlain, Gary. *Troubled Waters: Religion, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis*. • Helpful overview of different ways of thinking about water in a range of traditions, especially Abrahamic.
5. Hart, John. *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*. • See especially chapter 5, “Living Water”
6. Shaw, Sylvie and Andrew Francis (eds.). *Deep Blue: Critical Reflections on Nature, Religion and Water*. • See especially chapters 4 & 13: Melissa K. Nelson, Rivers of memory, lakes of survival: indigenous water traditions and the Anishinaabeg nation and David Groenfeldt, Animism, economics, and sustainable water development.
7. Henry, Gray (ed.). *Water and Its Spiritual Significance*.
8. Drewal, Henry John (ed.). *Sacred Waters: Arts for Mami Wata and Other Divinities in Africa and the Diaspora*.

### Books and articles concerned with aspects of water:

1. \*Emoto, Masaru. *The Message of Water, The Hidden Message in Water, and What the Bleep Do We Know!?*.
2. Glennon, Robert. *Unquenchable: America’s Water Crisis and What to Do About It*.
3. Ball, Philip. *Life’s Matrix: A Biography of Water*. • Explores the centrality of water to life on Earth through accessible and engaging scientific language (Ball is a chemist by training).
4. Pearce, Fred. *When the Rivers Run Dry: Water—the Defining Crisis of the Twenty-First Century*. • The general place to find an informed treatment of contemporary fresh water issues worldwide. Narratively and accessibly written and packed with information.
5. Shiva, Vandana. *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit*. Boston: South End Press, 2002. • A physicist-turned-activist from India, Shiva’s work has been groundbreaking in identifying the ill-effects of water policies on rural people in India and mobilizing for change. She is a vocal opponent of water privatization and is concerned about the well-being of human beings whose lives are conditioned by thirst.
6. Goldstein, J. *Demanding clean food and water: The fight for a basic human right*.



7. Hemson, D. *Poverty and water: Explorations of the reciprocal relationship*.
8. Whiteley, J. M., Ingram, H., & Perry, R. (Eds.) *Water, place and equity*.
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## Water-Related Website Resources

Maps: Kentucky River Basin [http://kgsweb.uky.edu/olops/pub/kgs/mc188\\_12.pdf](http://kgsweb.uky.edu/olops/pub/kgs/mc188_12.pdf)

Licking River Basin <http://www.lrww.org/data.htm>

Other drainages <http://kywater.org/watch/default.htm>

[christiansforthemountains.org/bible-theology/faith-statements](http://christiansforthemountains.org/bible-theology/faith-statements) (Church resolutions against MTR: Lutheran, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Unitarian, Quakers)

[fw.ky.gov](http://fw.ky.gov)

(Kentucky Department of Fish & Wildlife Resources)

[kyrc.org](http://kyrc.org)

(Kentucky Resource Council)

[kwalliance.org](http://kwalliance.org)

(Kentucky Waterways Alliance)

[floydsfork.org](http://floydsfork.org)

(Floyd's Fork Environmental Association) [sierraclub.org](http://sierraclub.org) (Sierra Club, Cumberland Chapter)

[unicef.org/wes](http://unicef.org/wes)

(UNICEF Water, Environment and Sanitation Program) [worldbank.org](http://worldbank.org) (World Bank Group)

[wbcsd.org](http://wbcsd.org)

(World Business Council for Sustainable Development)

[who.int/en](http://who.int/en)

(World Health Organization)

[epa.gov/water](http://epa.gov/water)

(Environmental Protection Agency)

[unescoihe.org/vmp/articles/contentsHomePage.html](http://unescoihe.org/vmp/articles/contentsHomePage.html)

(UNESCO Institute for Water Education)

[weforum.org/en/initiatives/water/index.htm](http://weforum.org/en/initiatives/water/index.htm)

(World Economic Forum Water Initiative)

[cres.org/star/star2009.htm#770](http://cres.org/star/star2009.htm#770)

(see also [/memorial/index.htm#holywater](http://memorial/index.htm#holywater) and [/pubs/EarthDay.htm](http://pubs/EarthDay.htm))

[witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/water](http://witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/water)

(article Water and the Sacred)

[projectconcern.org/site/PageServer?pagename=SD\\_Walk\\_for\\_Water\\_home](http://projectconcern.org/site/PageServer?pagename=SD_Walk_for_Water_home)

[mtv.com/thinkmtv/features/global/water\\_for\\_life](http://mtv.com/thinkmtv/features/global/water_for_life)

[circleofblue.org/waternews/2009/world/art-for-water-water-for-life](http://circleofblue.org/waternews/2009/world/art-for-water-water-for-life) [charitywater.org/www](http://charitywater.org/www)

[ohvec.org/issues/mountaintop\\_removal/articles/mtr\\_stat\\_2005\\_12.html](http://ohvec.org/issues/mountaintop_removal/articles/mtr_stat_2005_12.html) (fact sheet/statistics on Appalachian mountain top removal (courtesy of Julian Martin, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy)

[cceia.org/resources/transcripts/830.html](http://cceia.org/resources/transcripts/830.html) Blue gold: The fight to stop the corporate theft of the world's water.

[cesr.org/node/view/448](http://cesr.org/node/view/448) Center for Economic and Social Rights. Right to water fact sheet #2: Why a human right to water?

[cohre.org/water](http://cohre.org/water) Center on Housing Rights and Evictions. Right to water.

[cceia.org/resources/transcripts/94.html](http://cceia.org/resources/transcripts/94.html) The contested terrain of water development and human rights.

[umn.edu/humanrts/gencomm/escgencom15.htm](http://umn.edu/humanrts/gencomm/escgencom15.htm) Full text of the United Nations Committee for Economic, Social & Cultural Rights general comment 15, the right to water.

[thewscc.org/columbia-river](http://thewscc.org/columbia-river) Catholic Bishops of the Watershed Region. The Columbia River watershed: Caring for creation and the common good. [Pastoral letter].

[coejl.org/Energy\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://coejl.org/Energy_Toolkit.pdf)

[renewalproject.net/auburn](http://renewalproject.net/auburn)

[witcombe.sbc.edu/sacred\\_places](http://witcombe.sbc.edu/sacred_places) Introduction to sacred places and 7 sections (Sacredness, the Sacred Cave, Stones and the Sacred, Mountains and the Sacred, Trees and the Sacred, and Water and the Sacred)

[water.usgs.gov](http://water.usgs.gov)

[ecospeakers.com](http://ecospeakers.com)

[thewaterproject.org/water\\_scarcity](http://thewaterproject.org/water_scarcity)

[hanover.edu/academics/centers/rih](http://hanover.edu/academics/centers/rih)

[video.liveearth.org](http://video.liveearth.org)

[eartheasy.com/live\\_water\\_saving.htm](http://eartheasy.com/live_water_saving.htm)

[epa.gov/water](http://epa.gov/water)

[wateradvocates.org](http://wateradvocates.org)

[kyguild.org](http://kyguild.org)

[waterforourworld.com](http://waterforourworld.com)

[soh2o.org](http://soh2o.org)

[livingwatersfortheworld.org](http://livingwatersfortheworld.org)

[religionsforpeace.org](http://religionsforpeace.org)

[waterforpeople.org](http://waterforpeople.org)

[rotary.org/en](http://rotary.org/en)

[saveourh2o.org](http://saveourh2o.org)

[waterart.com](http://waterart.com)

## Water-Related Curriculum Resources

[www.louisvillewater.com/education/teachingbooklet](http://www.louisvillewater.com/education/teachingbooklet) — 11 sections on curriculum materials and programs

[www.msdlouky.org/education](http://www.msdlouky.org/education) — Louisville's Metropolitan Sewer District offers numerous curriculum studies (user friendly)

[www.louisvilleky.gov/LWC/Education/Teaching+Booklet+-+Adventures+in+Water](http://www.louisvilleky.gov/LWC/Education/Teaching+Booklet+-+Adventures+in+Water) — Offers classroom programs, curriculum materials and field trips. City of Louisville, Kentucky

[www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/Departments/Gheens/.html](http://www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/Departments/Gheens/.html)

[www.kentuckyawake.org/files/pdfs/curricula/4H/4H\\_waterResourceList](http://www.kentuckyawake.org/files/pdfs/curricula/4H/4H_waterResourceList).

[www.keec.ky.gov/publications.htm](http://www.keec.ky.gov/publications.htm) — Kentucky Environmental Education Council. Kentucky's Wonderful Commonwealth of Water. Curriculum teaches what we mean by biodiversity and why it is important.

[www.education.ky.gov/KDE/.../Academic+Expectation+21.htm](http://www.education.ky.gov/KDE/.../Academic+Expectation+21.htm) — Transformations Vol. I - Kentucky's Curriculum Framework (Browser Format) ... monitoring network (e.g., Kentucky Water Watch Program)

[www.uky.edu/UE/CC/water.htm](http://www.uky.edu/UE/CC/water.htm) — University of Kentucky Water Resources Research Institute. Curriculum, including mathematics and chemistry activities.

[www.state.ky.us/nrepc/water/vm.htm](http://www.state.ky.us/nrepc/water/vm.htm) — Volunteer Monitoring Web Sites — THE RIVERS CURRICULUM PROJECT On-Line Data Entry Form.

[www.stormwater.kytc.ky.gov/MCM1/mcm1\\_targetaudiences\\_schools.html](http://www.stormwater.kytc.ky.gov/MCM1/mcm1_targetaudiences_schools.html) — Settings across Kentucky to investigate water from rain and monitor (K-12 Curriculum)

[www.envethics.org/curriculum/introduction/water](http://www.envethics.org/curriculum/introduction/water) — The purpose of this lesson is to help students gain an understanding of the importance of water conservation.

[www.epa.gov/enviroed/grants/KY02.htm](http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/grants/KY02.htm) — EE Grants Awarded in Kentucky partnering with the Western Kentucky University's Center for Water Resource

[www.epa.gov/teachers/water](http://www.epa.gov/teachers/water)

[www.k12science.org/curriculum/dipproj](http://www.k12science.org/curriculum/dipproj) — Once a year, students will team up around the globe to test fresh water.

[www.cals.arizona.edu/AZWATER/wet/R\\_Curriculum.html](http://www.cals.arizona.edu/AZWATER/wet/R_Curriculum.html)

[www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cm1s/eval/curriculum/pathfinders/water/index.htm](http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/cm1s/eval/curriculum/pathfinders/water/index.htm)

[www.rainbird.com/pdf/iuow/IUOW-Curriculum.pdf](http://www.rainbird.com/pdf/iuow/IUOW-Curriculum.pdf) — Explorations Into Water Teaching Curriculum The Importance of Water – Activities for students(ages 8-12)

[www.umtsd.org/Curriculum/science/water.html](http://www.umtsd.org/Curriculum/science/water.html) — Students investigate the properties of water, changes in water, interactions between water and other earth materials.

[www.wetcity.org/resources.htm](http://www.wetcity.org/resources.htm) — The WET in the City Curriculum and Activity Guide is a multi-disciplinary, hands-on urban water education curriculum that engages K-12 students — WET is an excellent foundation curriculum for water quality monitoring projects or stream restoration work.

[www.longwood.edu/cleanva/teachersvawatercurriculum.htm](http://www.longwood.edu/cleanva/teachersvawatercurriculum.htm) — Virginia's Water Resources—A Tool for Teachers

[www.peer.tamu.edu/curriculum\\_modules/Water\\_Quality](http://www.peer.tamu.edu/curriculum_modules/Water_Quality) — Water quality is more than meets the eye. Some properties are invisible. Here you'll learn how to measure five of them.

[www.king.wsu.edu/enviro/Curriculum.htm](http://www.king.wsu.edu/enviro/Curriculum.htm) — Training Environmental Stewards from Mountains to Ocean: A Water Quality Curriculum. CSREES/USDA No. 2002-51130-01940. Washington State University King County Extension, Renton, WA

[www.txstreamteam.rivers.txstate.edu/Publications/Curriculum.html](http://www.txstreamteam.rivers.txstate.edu/Publications/Curriculum.html) — Cross-curriculum — Exercises are appropriate for classrooms that have been collecting monthly water quality monitoring data at a local site or that are able to download water .Texas Stream Team : TX State Univ.

[www.water1st.org/assets/curriculum/water1st\\_science\\_activities.pdf](http://www.water1st.org/assets/curriculum/water1st_science_activities.pdf) — Water Challenge (4 th-6 th) As part of a water education day, challenge your students to try to make it through the day using only one gallon of water.

[www.mtcws.mtu.edu/Education/WaterQualityUnit.htm](http://www.mtcws.mtu.edu/Education/WaterQualityUnit.htm) — Living in the water-rich Great Lakes basin, many Michigan students take water for granted. The MEECS (Michigan Environmental Education Curriculum Support) Water Quality Unit is designed to provide students with a solid foundation in understanding the critical importance water. [also see Science & Social Studies (Gr. 6-8) Introduction]

[www.ecy.wa.gov/services/ee/curricul.html](http://www.ecy.wa.gov/services/ee/curricul.html)

[www.senrm.sa.gov.au/EnvironmentalEducation/WaterWatch/CurriculumResources](http://www.senrm.sa.gov.au/EnvironmentalEducation/WaterWatch/CurriculumResources) — Contains 10 projects which teachers can use to conduct a unit study on topics related to water.

[www.rainbird.com/iuow/community/curriculum.htm](http://www.rainbird.com/iuow/community/curriculum.htm) — What is it? Rain Bird's Explorations Into Water Teaching Curriculum is an educational tool for teachers and parents.

[www.harvestingrainwater.com/rainwater-harvesting-inforesources/water-harvesting-curriculum](http://www.harvestingrainwater.com/rainwater-harvesting-inforesources/water-harvesting-curriculum) — This curriculum has been developed by Kent and Diane Sorensen, Brad Lancaster, and others. LESSON ONE. ASSESSING A SITE'S WATER and WATERSHEDS

[www.eduplace.com/ss/act/music.html](http://www.eduplace.com/ss/act/music.html) Students listen to music about water and react to different tempos and moods. Also, gather, with student help, examples of music with water themes

## Essays (Sermons, Homilies, and Commentaries)

Due to size constraints, it is impossible to include all the fine water-related essays that could be used by various people in their professions (ministers, priests, rabbis, imams, faith leaders) and by other interested people. However, the Center for Interfaith Relations will serve as a repository for other sources. Please contact it at <http://www.interfaithrelations.org>.

*Three* entries have been chosen for inclusion and for your conversations on *Sacred Water: Sustaining Life*.

### 1. *Dealing With An Inconvenient Truth* by Fr. John S. Rausch, Catholic Priest

Al Gore won an Oscar for his film, *An Inconvenient Truth*, a documentary about global warming. In accepting the award for Best Documentary he said, “We need to solve the climate crisis. It’s not a political issue. It’s a moral issue.” He couched global warming for a billion viewers worldwide watching the Academy Awards not as a partisan issue, but as an ethical one.

The 2007 report issued by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—a body of distinguished scientists established by the UN and the World Meteorological Association—concluded that “the warming of the climate is unequivocal” and that climate change is “very likely” caused by humans. The use of “very likely” means a greater than 90 percent certainty that global warming results from our burning fossil fuels.

The consequences of global warming, according to the report, will likely include stronger storms, longer droughts and more frequent heat waves. Sea levels are projected to rise 7 to 23 inches by the end of the century flooding coastal areas and redrawing shoreline geography. To avoid the most catastrophic scenarios, climatologists are urging nations to cut greenhouse gas emissions 70 percent by 2050.

The Kyoto Protocol, an agreement ratified by over 160 countries, requires nations by 2012 to cut greenhouse gases by an average of 5 percent below their 1990 levels. While a 5 percent reduction sounds meager, it actually represents a 29 percent reduction in the level of emissions projected for 2010 given the rate of growth without the agreement.



Because the Bush Administration argues that the Kyoto agreement would hurt the U.S. economy, it has refused to ratify the agreement. Instead, the U.S. is spending \$3 billion a year on research and development of cleaner energy technology to combat climate change. Scientists counsel the issue looms so large and so critical that the world's future depends on both reducing emissions and devising advanced technology.

Like Al Gore, people of faith see global warming as a moral issue. The U.S. bishops in their 2001 statement, "Global Climate Change," state: "At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, not about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family." Their statement echoes the teaching of John Paul II who argued that humanity with its free will has "a grave responsibility to preserve this order for the well-being of future generations."

Bishop Thomas Wenski, chairman of the USCCB's International Policy Committee, emphasizes three principles from Catholic social teachings in dealing with global warming: prudence, the poor, and the common good. By prudence he does not mean caution, but "in this case (prudence) 'requires us to act with urgency' lest the problem gets worse and the remedies more costly." Enough evidence exists that prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action about global warming.

Another principle, "priority for the poor," demands we not forget the vulnerable who pay the greatest price during natural disasters. A report issued by over 15 charitable organizations including Oxfam and Christian Aid, predicts more flooding, declining food production, more disease, and deteriorating ecosystems on which the poorest depend because of global warming. Solidarity with the poor demands attention to climate change.

The third principle, "the pursuit of the common good," questions an unbridled free market solution. Social controls need to harness oil, coal and industrial interests so all can have enough while caring for the earth.

Undoubtedly, by recognizing our stewardship of the earth, people of faith can deal with this inconvenient truth.

## 2. COMMENTARY: Religious Environmentalism: Some Good News for a Change By Roger S. Gottlieb (excerpts)

There are few easier ways to fish—in the (very) short run, of course—than using dynamite. However the long-term results—depletion of fish stocks, destruction of the sheltering coral reef—made the government of Tanzania forbid the practice. But local fisherman continued dynamiting, ignoring government pamphlets, stringent laws and advice from western ecologists. What finally led them to stop and undertake plans for long-term sustainable fishing practices was the Koran. In 2000, local sheiks were brought together by the U.K.-based Alliance for Religions and Conservation, the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science, the World Wildlife Fund and CARE. The sheiks ruled that exploding ecosystems violated Koranic injunctions against wasting God’s creation—and the dynamiting days were over.

Half a world away, following the tenets of Chinese religion rather than Islam, researchers at the world-renowned Beijing School of Traditional Chinese Medicine are trying to protect endangered species by changing traditional prescriptions which call for ingredients like tiger penis, bear gal and rhinoceros horn. The high price of these ingredients leads poachers to violate international bans on their trade, but the researchers have argued that the use of endangered species violates Buddhist and Taoist principle of balance in nature, and thus are bad for both the environment and the soul.

In 2004 the sixth annual meeting of Sisters of Earth, a loose network of American nuns, mingled presentations on sustainability, eco-spirituality, earth literacy and bioregionalism with religious celebration. The participants... run organic farms, educate their local communities about the virtues of local food movement, and protest destructive World Bank practices. They seek, as one of them puts it, to “live lightly on the earth,” and, as another says, “to bring to awareness the dangerous loss of biodiversity and the usurpation of seed lines” by multinational corporations. The women embrace both Catholicism and all people of goodwill. While they believe in the Trinity, they see the Father, Son and Holy Spirit permeating all life.

These localized movements reflect a much larger, historically unprecedented and enormously hopeful global movement of religious environmentalism. Facing the same environmental crisis that their secular counterparts do, people of faith have been changing their basic attitudes towards nature and seeing the moral connections between our treatment of nature and our treatment of people.

Pope John Paul II, for example, began his reign as pontiff by warning of “threats to man’s natural environment” and criticizing practices that “alienate us from nature.” Two decades later, in 2000, he went farther... [speaking] of trying to return nature to its rightful position as the “sister of humanity.” When one considers that for centuries the Church repressed any indigenous religion which taught the sanctity of nature, we see that this is a profound change.

The Pope’s words have been matched by other members of the Church becoming actively involved in local environmental concerns. The U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops mailed a series of packets of theological and practical environmental sources to every single parish in the country. In 2001 Bishops of the Columbia River Watershed... issued a glossy 20 page booklet advocating an “ecological vision” in which the “common goal” of industry and the environmental movement would be the “well-being of the entire community of life”; agriculture would be as organic as possible; mining would not endanger water, fish, air or land; environmental damage from logging would be paid for by logging companies, not pawned off on the public; and alternative energy sources would be developed. Years before, in 1988, bishops of the Philippines authored the heartfelt “What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?”—a remarkable document that confronted that nation’s severe environmental problems.

The list goes on and on. The world’s Sikhs have committed themselves to a 300-year project of making all their institutions low-impact and energy efficient. Buddhist monks from five different nations have organized against Asian deforestation and water pollution. The American Evangelical Lutheran Church has supported Fair Trade Coffee and a ban on the sale of timber from old growth forests.

These and literally thousands of other examples reveal some remarkable, and remarkably hopeful, patterns. For one thing, in a time when many of us wonder if religion should be limited to something done by consenting adults in private, religious environmentalism is an example of people of faith engaging in politics in ways that are humane, respectful of democracy, and in the best interests of humanity, indeed of life, as a whole. The movement is marked by intense civic concern, not bolstering the beliefs of one group against everyone else.

Religious environmentalism also often tends to be deeply ecumenical. Jews and Buddhists sign common calls to action with Hindus and Baptists; Christian statements honor the wisdom of indigenous people. Starting in the early 1990s, in fact, there

has been highly visible, public joint work between religious leaders and scientists. Acknowledging one another's expertise and differences, Nobel Prize winners and Episcopal bishops, rabbis and physicists, have issued calls for critical changes in the way we produce, consume and manage our common affairs.

To the surprise of many, religious environmentalism is a rising force not only among the "usual suspects" of mild-mannered Buddhists, liberal Protestants and Reform Jews, but among some of the more socially, politically and religiously conservative. A split in the Evangelical community resulting from environmental attitudes has been emerging for some time. In January some Evangelical Christian leaders held a joint press conference with Harvard scientists calling for action on global warming. A year before, 87 Evangelical leaders had taken out a full-page ad in the New York Times on the issue, publicly disassociating themselves from other Evangelical leaders who distance themselves from environmental concerns. In 2002 the Evangelical Environmental Network sponsored the 'What Would Jesus Drive?' Campaign, which challenged Detroit automakers, proceeded in a cavalcade through the south and ended at the nation's largest Christian rock festival. "Making transportation choices that threaten million of human beings," the leaders proclaimed, "violates Jesus' basic commandments, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' and 'Do unto others as you would have them do to you.'"

Religious leaders have not been afraid to confront the basic structural problems responsible for the environmental crisis. An umbrella organization representing some 400 million Christians, The World Council of Churches, has been a frequent presence at international meetings on climate change. Embodying an awareness of the relation between "socioeconomic justice and environmental sustainability" it has called for a fundamentally "new economic paradigm" in which long-term environmental health takes precedence over compulsive economic growth.

All this action has been accompanied by serious rethinking of some of religion's guiding principles. Jews and Christians wrestle with biblical passages which say that only human beings are "made in the image of God" and are given "dominion over the earth." A whole new generation of "eco-theologians"—thinkers who, in Protestant Larry Rasmussen's phrase, do theology from the "standpoint of earth community"—have taken a new look at some very old scriptures. "Made in the image of God" is now read as "be God's representatives on Earth"; and "dominion" is read as "responsible care" rather than reckless greed. These eco-theologians emphasize dozens of passages in the Bible which form the basis of a solid environmental ethic.

They focus on injunctions in which God forbids taking the mother bird with her eggs and cutting down fruit trees in a siege. The ox cannot be muzzled as he threshes the grain and you must help your enemy's donkey if he is crushed under his load.

For many, the importance of religious environmentalism goes beyond local church members joining the Sierra Club or starting a recycling center. Ecotheologians argue that a religious vision brings something distinct and very valuable to the secular environmental movement. For one thing, when secular environmentalists rail at out-of-control unsustainable consumerism they often come off sounding like shrill spoilsports. "Buy less," may be a good idea, but it is not, in and of itself, all that appealing. Religious leaders can point to the simple (and comparatively non-polluting) pleasures of religious community as alternatives to consumerism. The joys of Sabbath rest, or the emotional comfort of a familiar congregation, provide replacements for the mall and Amazon.com. Of course one need not be religious to appreciate the nurturing aspects of community and rest. Yet these values are perhaps most familiar to us as presented by a culture of religion which, as writer Bill McKibben puts it, offers something other than accumulation as the highest goal of life.

There is also a deep seriousness in religious language, a seriousness which, for many environmentalists, speaks to the depth of the environmental crisis at hand... thus there is something appealing, even to many secular people, when Bartholomew, head of the 300 million strong Eastern Orthodox Church, states flatly that "To pollute the environment is a sin."

The natural alliance between religious and secular environmentalists is happening in thousands of local contexts where secularists and people of faith work together to resist climate change, toxic waste disposal and destructive economic "development." On a public level there has been some institutional cooperation as well. The Sierra Club and the National Council of Churches sponsored a joint television ad in defense of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. While "God" was left out of the ad, "creation"—after some lively debate—was kept in. The heads of both the Sierra Club and the NCC reported nearly unanimous positive feedback. Since then, the Sierra Club has set up several liaisons with the religious community, devoting more than \$100,000 a year to joint work.

Finally, religious environmentalists have had to develop a comprehensive social and ecological vision of the interconnection of all life. The "eco-justice" task forces of several major denominations assert that every kind of political oppression has a

role in ecological degradation; and that social inequality makes groups more likely to suffer from pollution. In short, they believe that we cannot heal injustice without transforming our relationship to nature—and vice versa. This comprehensive perspective offers hope for a political movement that will transcend a moribund liberalism of separate and competing interest groups. In Sri Lanka and Mongolia, for example, religious leaders and grassroots organizations emphasize Buddhist values in their commitment to human centered, ecologically sound economic development.

As new as it is, no one can know what the future of religious environmentalism will be. All attempts to deal with the environmental crisis are hampered by economic globalization, addictive consumerism and widespread political passivity. Yet as a crucial institution of civil society, poised between government and the family, religion can play a potent role in any social struggle. For many people in the U.S. and throughout the world, religion is source of inspiration and a beacon of moral authority.

Of course most religious people are not environmentalists. But, many could argue, not that many secular people are either—at least in the sense of working hard to save the planet. And religious environmentalism has already made a real difference. If nothing else, says Hadar Suskind, Washington representative of the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, “People don’t wonder what the environment has to do with being Jewish anymore.” In similar terms Walt Grazer, director of the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops eco-justice task force, says: “We’ve helped people realize that caring for the environment is part of your religious faith as a believer...a way to say ‘yes,’ to say ‘thank you,’ to God.”

### **3. Standing Guard By Rev. Al Shands**

As I crossed the room, my gaze shifted upward towards the prospect of the Sangre de Christo mountains, a few miles distant from my window. The late afternoon light filtered down, creating wonderful shadows on the boulders, which seemed to have become sculptures dropped down by the gods. The peace of the afternoon had brought its gift, an openness to the magical ebb and flow of nature...the half-guessed secrets which surround us.

Inadvertently I looked down, and suddenly my eye was arrested by a very strange scene just outside on the terrace, a scene which in all probability I will never forget...a foot from the glass door, lay a dead bird. It had the look of a creature that had only recently died, its feathers still puffed out. A small bird, perhaps a common bird, with bright colorings on the tips of its

wings. But what made this such a curious sight was that about ten inches from the dead bird another bird sat poised facing away. The longer I looked, the less sure I was whether or not the second bird was actually alive. A tap on the window produced no movement. The bird had the surreal, mechanistic look of those uniformed guards before some palace gates, eyes unmoving, body unmoving, silently counting the seconds before the next maneuver. Now on the terrace, I began to step closer and closer towards the bird. Still it did not move. Then suddenly I saw a tiny jerk that gave the secret away. This was indeed a sentinel, a guard of honor, for a creature who had died.

And suddenly there was a strange pathos to the scene which made me weep, for there beside the guard lay a few bright red berries, which had been brought by that guardian as an offering to the one who had died. One of those intuitive, impulsive things that is done when there is really nothing that can be done. An impulse to try to ease the transition between life and death. A great sadness gripped me. I too became a mourner at this event. How had the creature died and why? And then the sadness was replaced with awe, that, in this guardian creature who stood watch, the tender feelings of loss for a fellow creature's death were stronger than fear of me, a human enemy. I perceived a humanity in nature that resonates with the feelings of compassion that rise up within us from time to time. How presumptuous of us humans to ever dare to believe that we are the unique abode of humanness. Whatever those sublime feelings are, they do not belong just to us. They belong to the mystery of creation itself, to all living things. And so on that terrace with the afternoon sun fading into evening, I glimpsed something of the transcendence of all things, that we are all bound together in God, only sometimes we forget.

### Questions to consider in light of Standing Guard and our sacred water:

How do we guard our sacred waters? Against what enemies?

What reminds us of our faith duties? Our moral duties?

Have we forgotten our interconnection with sacred water?

How do we find our passion for sacred creation?

## Music for Sacred Water: Sustaining Life

The Water Music is a collection of orchestral movements, often considered as three suites, composed by George Frideric Handel. It premiered in the summer on July 17, 1717 when King George I requested a concert on the River Thames. The concert was performed by 50 musicians playing on a barge close to the royal barge from which the King listened with some close friends (including the Duchess of Bolton, the Duchess of Newcastle, the Countess of Godolphin, Madam Kilmarnock, and the Earl of Orkney). George I was said to have loved it so much that he ordered the exhausted musicians to play the suites three times on the trip.[1] Water Music (Telemann) Ouverture Wassermusik (Hamburger Ebb und Fluth) TWV 55:C3, an orchestral suite by Georg Philipp Telemann.

A musical fantasia, Songs of Water is an exuberant collection of songs built upon one central theme - the unique mixture of hydrogen and oxygen that is water. "Long Journey Home" uses the resonant rhythms of a hammered dulcimer as an anchor for the rest of the piece, interspersed with violin and percussion in a manner reminiscent of Celtic reels and of sea chanties. "Come to the Well" fuses Celtic elements with a hint of the Greek rembetika, the bluesy bouzouki melodic style that redefined 20th-century Greek music, in a pleasing, though slightly melancholy fashion. The drum, violin, and guitar fuse perfectly with dulcimer in the Middle Eastern-inspired "In Places Forgotten" and "Mufafa's Kitchen," especially in the latter's catchy dulcimer refrain, while "Up From the Depths" slowly undulates with guitar and jazz trumpet, further revealing the versatility of these superb performers. Stephen Roach, Marta Richardson, and Israel Sarpolus revel in the unique elements of each track, flowing effortlessly from one style and instrument to another as easily as the water they seem to emulate. While each track has its own distinctive flavor, they form a stunning musical tour de force. Not quite folk music, or world music, or New Age, but consistently a delight that transcends genre and location and even time, Songs of Water is easily one of the finest CDs I have heard in several years. — Richard Mackenzie, *Mysteries Magazine*, Vol. 4, #3, Issue #14.



The Blue Danube is the common English title of *An der schönen blauen Donau* op. 314 (On the Beautiful Blue Danube), a waltz by Johann Strauss II, composed in 1866. The sentimental Viennese connotations of the piece have made it into a sort of unofficial Austrian national anthem. It is a traditional encore piece at the annual Vienna New Year's Concert. The Blue Danube was used for the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Bedřich Smetana was a Czech composer who pioneered the development of a musical style which became closely identified with his country's aspirations to independent statehood. He is thus widely regarded in his homeland as the father of Czech music. One of his best known pieces is the symphonic cycle *Má vlast* ("My Fatherland"), which he dedicated to the city of Prague. Its *Vltava* (Moldau) movement, depicting the river that runs through Prague towards its junction with the Elbe, is Smetana's best-known and most internationally popular orchestral composition.

A musical style called Water Music is traditionally played on Vanuatu when a ship is arriving. The musicians stand in the water and produce various sounds by hitting the water with the hands.

## Pop Quiz on Water

from Foreign Policy magazine, July/August, 2009

1. In the past 60 years, how many times have countries engaged in violence over water disputes?  
*A 37                      B 88                      C 145*
2. What percentage of the world's population depends on water sourced from the Tibetan plateau?  
*A 12 percent            B 24 percent            C 47 percent*
3. How much water does it take to grow a kilogram (2.2 lbs.) of wheat?  
*A 10 liters                B 100 liters              C 1,000 liters*
4. In developing countries, how far per day does the average female walk in order to fetch water?  
*A 1.9 miles                B 3.7 miles                C 6.2 miles*
5. What percentage of the world's population does not have access to toilets?  
*A 12 percent            B 23 percent            C 38 percent*
6. What percentage of illnesses in the developing world can be attributed to unsafe water?  
*A 20 percent            B 50 percent            C 80 percent*
7. People in the Lomas de Manchay shantytown near Lima, Peru, pay \$3.22 per cubic meter of water. How much do residents of Lima's exclusive Rinconada del Lago neighborhood pay?  
*A \$ 6.44                      B \$ 3.22                      C. \$ 0.45*
8. How much water does it take to produce 1 liter of bottled water?  
*A 0.5 liters                B 1.5 liters                C 3.0 liters*

## Answers to Pop Quiz on Water

1. **A. 37.** As populations grow and societies become wealthier, water consumption swells, leading many to predict that the future will be filled with conflicts over water. There is reason for optimism, however. In the 60 years, some 400 international water agreements have been signed, compared with 37 documented violent clashes between countries over water, according to researchers at Oregon State University.
2. **C. 47 percent.** The Tibetan plateau is Asia's principal source of water, feeding 10 of its major rivers and providing water for nearly half the world's people. Glaciers in the area, which feed rivers, are melting at unprecedented rates, and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts 80 percent of Himalayan glaciers will be gone by 2035. With more than one fourth of China classified as desert, the geopolitical implications could be ugly.
3. **C. 1,000 liters.** One thousand liters might sound like a lot, but it is nothing compared with the 15,000 liters or so necessary to produce a kilogram of beef. As more people rise out of poverty and into the middle class, meat consumption also rises. It takes about 2,000 liters per day to support the typical vegetarian in Asia or Africa, but about 5,000 liters daily for a carnivore in Europe or the United States.
4. **B. 3.7 miles.** In developing countries, women and girls walk an average of 3.7 mile (6 km) a day carrying 5.3 gallons (20 liters) of water, according to UNICEF. In rural Africa, women often walk 6.2 miles (10 km) daily, and twice that during the dry season, all while carrying as much as 50 pounds. The onerous task—which puts females at risk for sexual assault when they venture far from home — reduces the time girls can attend school and women can devote to other work.
5. **C. 38 percent.** Sanitation has been one of the greatest advances in public health, but 2.6 billion of the world's people — around two out of five — lack basic sanitation. That unfortunate fact contributes to 5,000 deaths of children very day from infectious diarrhea.
6. **C. 80 percent.** Shockingly, unsafe water accounts for four fifths of all illnesses in developing countries, according to a U.N. study. Thirty percent of deaths in developing countries are attributed to poor water quality.
7. **C. \$0.45.** Slum dwellers in many developing countries — from Peru to India to Indonesia — pay far more for water than wealthier people. The well-to-do get government-subsidized water from metered connections while the poor must buy it from trucks that regularly drive through shantytowns and haul brimming jerry cans home.
8. **C. 3 liters.** Producing 1 liter of bottled water requires 3 liters of water — 1 liter to go inside the bottle and 2 liters used in the production process — according to a 2006 estimate by the California-based Pacific Institute. The amount of oil needed to fill the bottles with water, transport them, chill them, and dispose of or recycle them can amount to one fourth a bottle's volume.

*Contributors*

14th Annual Festival of Faiths

Faith in Action Tool Kit

*Christina Lee Brown*

*Festival of Faiths Tool Kit Originator and Benefactor*

*Kathleen Lyons, PhD*

*Professor Emerita, Bellarmine University*

*Editor / Writer*

*Maria Montes*

*CIR Summer Intern*

*Student at Wake Forest University*

*Vicki Warren*

*Retired JCPS High School Teacher*

*Assistant to Christina Lee Brown*

*Faith in Action Tool Kit is printed on recycled paper.*



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Religious communities are, without question, the largest and best-organized civil institutions in the world today, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and bridging the divides of race, class, and nationality.

They are uniquely equipped to meet the challenges of our time: resolving conflicts, caring for the earth, the sick and needy, and promoting peaceful co-existence among all people.

-Religions for Peace