



Water: A Basic Human Right

Life is impossible without water. "Since the very birth of human civilization, people have moved to settle close to it. People move when there is too little of it...when there is too much of it. People journey down it ... write, sing and dance about it. People fight over it. And all people everywhere and every day need it.

Mikhail Gorbachev, President of Green Cross International



Here in Cincinnati we seldom think about water as a precious resource. We have the Ohio river flowing through our community. Water is abundant. Yet, this is not the case in many places in the world.

The amount of water on the earth remains constant. There is the same amount of water on the planet now as there was at Creation. We cannot increase the amount of water. We can only change how we use and care for it.



97% of all water is ocean salt water
2% is glacier, polar caps and inaccessible ground water
only 0.8% is freshwater accessible for agriculture, energy, industrial and personal use

Threats to an adequate and safe world-wide water supply include:

- Increase in demand for water as the world's population increases
- Contamination from cities, agriculture, mining, manufacturing, recreation and industry
- Poor water management
- Climate change
- Overuse and unnecessary wastage

As water becomes increasingly scarce in many parts of the world, it

- Is often distributed unequally based on class, gender and ethnicity
- Has become a commodity to be sold and traded
- Is the cause of over 2 million deaths annually due to "lack of water" related disease
- Is a contributing factor in political disputes

In 2002, the **United Nations** declared:

"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 of all other human rights.

Scripture and Church Leaders say...

Be glad O people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for God has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. God sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains. Joel 2:23

I was thirsty and you gave me to drink. Lord when did we see you thirsty and give you to drink? I assure you, as often as you did it for one of my least brothers, you did it for me. Matthew 25: 35,37,40

"Every day we are seeing more and more heartbreaking news about...drought and famine...It is a humanitarian crisis that cries out for help from Christians throughout the world."

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, President USCCB

"Attention needs to be paid to the world-wide problem of water and to the global water cycle system, which is of prime importance for life on earth." Pope Benedict XVI, January 1, 2010

The Challenge? To guarantee that all people have and will continue to have access to the clean water necessary to survive.

According to UN and US estimates, by 2015, at least 40% of the world's population will not have enough water to meet their basic needs. By 2015, 48 nations will face freshwater scarcity.

Who should control/regulate access to water—individuals? governments? multinational corporations? the United Nations?

A few facts about water usage...

- It is estimated that 13 gallons of water daily is needed to sustain human life. Most Africans use 12 gallons per day, most Americans, 153 gallons per day.
- Daily, more than 200 million hours of women's time is spent collecting water for domestic use.
- A leaking faucet can waste 100 gallons a day.
- Every 20 seconds a child dies from a water - related disease.
- 70% of all freshwater is used for agricultural irrigation.

As stewards of God's Creation, we are called to...

- Realize our use and abuse of water impacts the planet, ourselves and others.
- Pray for those already affected by drought conditions.
- Be aware of and respond to water issues in the news.
- Become part of the solution. Conserve water to preserve an irreplaceable natural resource.
- Hold our elected officials responsible for making just decisions concerning the quality of water and access to it for all people.
- Support the work of UNICEF, Catholic Relief Services and other organizations working to guarantee access to clean water for all.