



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

Volume 22, Number 1

Winter 2013

The Right to Water

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"Perhaps there is no greater right than the right of a drop of water to come back to the watersheds and water systems that nourish all life and maintain the integrity of the Water Common."
-- "Our Water Commons" by Maude Barlow, The Council of Canadians, p.24

EXPERIENCE

Raised on the shores of Lake Michigan, I never did learn to swim. The cold, cold water took my breath away. Yet this did not hinder my enjoyment of water as "speaker of wisdom" in my life. In reflecting on the topic, I realized water has been a focus in my annual retreats. A retreat in southern Mississippi offered the luxury of a swimming pool. I came prepared with my floatation device. In the midst of enjoying my swim, while thanking God for water, the realization struck me that God has been my floatation device; carrying me through life. At a retreat near a spring, the walk down from the hills, reminded me that the descent of water over the stones and pebbles gave it a song to sing; telling me that life is not lived without

obstacles that challenge me to grow. Another memorable retreat, on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, told me it was time to move out of my head and into my heart, as the ocean told of "deep calling unto deep" (Ps. 42); the Lord ministering to me from the depths of the heart of God.

As a member of the non-governmental organization (NGO) UNANIMA International (1), I participated in putting together a project on water issues. I learned that water is tangible. Water has a personality, dark and brooding or bright and sparkling. Water has a double-edged dynamic: beneficial/destructive; clean/polluted; and wasted/conserved. Water occupies a complex place in the global community.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Some basic facts about water:

- 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water.
- 2.6 billion people lack basic sanitation and suffer the resulting water-related illnesses.
- 12 percent of the world's population uses 85 percent of the world's water supply.

Over the next 50 years, the world's population will increase dramatically. Population growth, coupled with global water consumption doubling every 20



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years will have serious consequences. Increasingly corporations see water as a commodity to be bought and sold for profit. Private, for-profit water companies which provide water services have benefited many in developed countries. The story is very different in developing countries. Bolivia's poor could not afford the connection charges required by the private provider. Some 200,000 people in Cochabamba, a quarter of the population, were not connected. After street protests and riots resulting in killings, the government cancelled the agreement with Bechtel and United Utilities.

Another blatant example of the reduction of water to a commodity is the practice of American Water in the US. American Water is selling water to gas-drilling companies at a lower price than the water it sells to households. On average, drillers pay 45 percent less than residential customers pay per gallon of water. This disparity favors large water users and results in \$1.6 million in revenue for the private water industry.

Shale gas fracking is a windfall for the commercial water industry. Fracking uses significantly more water than conventional natural gas production. Unsustainable water withdrawals combined with drought conditions will reduce water supply and effect climate change.

The fundamental question is whether water is a human right or a commodity; the fundamental birth-right of all or a privileged resource accessible only to those who can afford it. Increasing scarcity will exacerbate the current inequality and the problem will continue to grow.

Many experts claim water management, NOT water scarcity, is the problem. There is sufficient water if there is effective water management. Management is effective if, and only if, it maintains

water's infrastructure so water is not lost in transport; protects and maintains the ecology of the watershed to prevent pollution of rivers and lakes; uses technology to monitor water conservation; and educates the population regarding water preservation.

The challenges are great in both the Global South and the Global North. Developing countries discharge a high percentage of untreated waste into local rivers and streams, while developed countries over-consume water. Water

REFLECTION

Water must be recognized as a human right and a critical environmental issue. To ensure that everyone has access to safe drinking water and sanitation, several measures need to be taken:

- Guarantee the right to water;
- Decentralize the responsibility for water management to local and regional agents;
- Develop communication networks to provide up-to-date information to people at the local level;
- Increase and improve financing for infrastructure and sanitation maintenance;
- Train local populations in water harvesting;
- Develop eco-sanitation—turning waste into a resource.

The need is clear; the issue is critical. What is lacking is the political will to address these difficult issues and to secure the financing necessary to address them.

ACTION

1. Educate yourself and others.
 - Many websites provide excellent resources on water issues including: www.unwater.org, wateruseitwisely.com and www.foodandwaterwatch.org.
 - Read Reflections of Water by Dr. Heather Eaton www.nccecojustice.org/downloads/water/Reflections_on_Water.pdf
 - Read Blue Covenant: Global Water Crisis and Fight for the Right to Water by Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of Council of Canadians and Chair of the Board of Food and Water Watch
2. Join a water focus group and pledge to:
 - Clean up polluted rivers, lake, wet lands;
 - Eliminate bottled water;
 - Address fracking issues.

Source: www.globalissues.org/article/601/water-and-development

Endnote

UNANIMA, a NGO affiliated with the United Nations is a coalition of 17 congregation of religious women and their partners in mission on all continents.

