

CATHOLIC SOCIAL PRINCIPLES TOWARDS WATER AND SANITATION
Compiled by Dennis Warner, Catholic Relief Services, February 3, 2009

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Catholic Social Principles Towards Water and Sanitation

Summary Principles

Water is 'a universal and inalienable right' for all people and an 'essential and indispensable gift' from God. Its use must be guided by 'reason and solidarity,' taking into account the 'growing and perennial needs of people who live in poverty'.

The use of water - which is seen as a universal and inalienable right - is related to the growing and urgent needs of those living in poverty, keeping in mind that the 'limited access to drinkable water affects the wellbeing of an enormous number of people and is frequently the cause of illness, suffering, conflict, poverty, and also death'. By its very nature water cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others. The distribution of water is traditionally among the responsibilities that fall to public agencies, since water is considered a public good. If water distribution is entrusted to the private sector it should still be considered a public good. The right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right.

Water is a natural resource vital for the survival of humanity and all species on earth. As a good of creation, water is destined for all human beings and their communities. God intended the earth and all it contains for the use of all, so that all created things would be shared fairly by humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity. Human beings, and the communities in which they live, cannot do without water since it corresponds to their primary needs and constitutes a basic condition of their existence. All depend upon the fate of water. Access to safe water and sanitation is indispensable for the life and full development of all human beings and communities in the world. Common good is understood as the social conditions that allow people to reach their full human potential. Water is a universal common good, a common good of the entire human family. Its benefits are meant for all and not only for those who live in countries where water is abundant, well managed and well distributed. This natural resource must be equitably at the disposal of the entire human family.

Water is our inheritance from the Creator. It is both a sacred gift and a central symbol in all religious traditions. No other dimension of life on Earth has such spiritual meaning as water. When water is neither pure nor clean its ability to carry such symbolic weight is threatened. At the same time water is an "endangered species", with its purity, nurturing power, free-flow and availability for all under attack. Too often, it is on the World agenda as an "economic good", a commodity that can be owned by powerful entities and distributed according to the highest bidder. We must embrace a vision of community that is guided by the principles of the common good, participation by all and accountability at every level.

The concepts that should direct the issue of water are:

- Right to water: Access to clean and sufficient water supply is a human right.

- Privatization and the common good: there are inherent dangers associated with viewing water as just another commodity, to be sold in the market place.
- The Integrity of Creation: A Christian is called to promote and protect the environment, not only for the benefits of the human community, but for the integrity of the whole of creation.
- The Prevention Principle: Prevention of harm is the best method of environmental protection and pro-poor strategies.
- The Precautionary Principle: Decisions and actions must be taken to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm, even where scientific knowledge is insufficient or inconclusive.
- The Polluter Pays Principle: Those causing harm should pay compensation to victims and pay for redress of environmental damage caused.
- Righteous indignation: Knowledge of environmental degradation and exclusion from access to water, along with the dangers inherent in its commercialization in favor of the privileged, should elicit a just indignation among the followers of Jesus.

Water is

- A sacred gift and a central symbol in all religions
- A universal and unalienable right
- Indispensable for human existence
- A community responsibility
- A common good of the entire human family
- A public good that must be protected from narrow commodification
- The basis for human dignity and quality of life
- A bond that links us all together

Excerpt from “Water and Conflict: Incorporating Peacebuilding into Water Development”, by Jason Gehrig, CRS, Oct 2008 (draft)

A. Catholic Social Teaching Principles Applied to Water

In July 2008, Cardinal Renato Martino, head of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, delivered Pope Benedict XVI’s message to the International Exposition on Water and Sustainable Development in Spain (C. Glatz, 2008). The pope’s message was quite clear:

Water is ‘a universal and inalienable right’ for all people and an ‘essential and indispensable gift’ from God. Its use must be guided by ‘reason and solidarity,’ taking into account the ‘growing and perennial needs of people who live in poverty’.

This built upon an earlier address by the Holy See at the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto, 2003, where the Vatican communicated a series of concepts in applying Catholic Social Thought to the critical issue of water. These included:

- *Right to water:* Access to clean and sufficient water supply is a human right.
- *Privatization and the common good:* there are inherent dangers associated with viewing water as just another commodity, to be sold in the market place.
- *The Integrity of Creation:* A Christian is called to promote and protect the environment, not only for the benefits of the human community, but for the integrity of the whole of creation.
- *The Prevention Principle:* Prevention of harm is the best method of environmental protection and pro-poor strategies.
- *The Precautionary Principle:* Decisions and actions must be taken to avoid the possibility of serious or irreversible environmental harm, even where scientific knowledge is insufficient or inconclusive.
- *The Polluter Pays Principle:* Those causing harm should pay compensation to victims and pay for redress of environmental damage caused.
- *Righteous indignation:* Knowledge of environmental degradation and exclusion from access to water, along with the dangers inherent in its commercialization in favor of the privileged, should elicit a just indignation among the followers of Jesus (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2003).

**COMPENDIUM
OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE
OF THE CHURCH**

**TO HIS HOLINESS POPE JOHN PAUL II
MASTER OF SOCIAL DOCTRINE AND
EVANGELICAL WITNESS
TO JUSTICE AND PEACE**

Excerpts regarding water:

**CHAPTER SEVEN
ECONOMIC LIFE**

I. BIBLICAL ASPECTS

b. Wealth exists to be shared

329. *Riches fulfil their function of service to man when they are destined to produce benefits for others and for society.*[685] “How could we ever do good to our neighbour,” asks St. Clement of Alexandria, “if none of us possessed anything?”.[686] In the perspective of St. John Chrysostom, riches belong to some people so that they can gain merit by sharing them with others.[687] Wealth is a good that comes from God and is to be used by its owner and made to circulate so that even the needy may enjoy it. Evil is seen in the immoderate attachment to riches and the desire to hoard. St. Basil the Great invites the wealthy to open the doors of their storehouses and he exhorts them: “A great torrent rushes, in thousands of channels, through the fertile land: thus, by a thousand different paths, make your riches reach the homes of the poor”.[688] Wealth, explains Saint Basil, is like water that issues forth from the fountain: the greater the frequency with which it is drawn, the purer it is, while it becomes foul if the fountain remains unused.[689] The rich man — Saint Gregory the Great will later say — is only an them. He who retains riches only for himself is not innocent; giving to those in need means paying a debt.[690]

V. THE “NEW THINGS” IN THE ECONOMIC SECTOR

365. *An adequate solidarity in the era of globalization requires that human rights be defended.* In this regard, the Magisterium points out that not only the “vision of an effective international public authority at the service of human rights, freedom and peace has not yet been entirely achieved, but there is still in fact much hesitation in the international community about the obligation to respect and implement human rights. This duty touches all fundamental rights, excluding that arbitrary picking and choosing which can lead to rationalizing forms of discrimination and injustice. Likewise, we are witnessing the emergence of an alarming gap between a series of new ‘rights’ being promoted in advanced societies – the result of new prosperity and new technologies – and other more basic human rights still not being met, especially in situations of underdevelopment. I am thinking here for example about the right to food and drinkable water, to housing and security, to self-determination and independence – which are still far from being guaranteed and realized”.[755]

CHAPTER NINE

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

IV. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

a. Cooperation to guarantee the right to development

447. *The Church's social doctrine encourages forms of cooperation that are capable of facilitating access to the international market on the part of countries suffering from poverty and underdevelopment. “Even in recent years it was thought that the poorest countries would develop by isolating themselves from the world market and by depending only on their own resources. Recent experience has shown that countries which did this have suffered stagnation and recession, while the countries which experienced development were those which succeeded in taking part in the general interrelated economic activities at the international level. It seems therefore that the chief problem is that of gaining fair access to the international market, based not on the unilateral principle of the exploitation of the natural resources of these countries but on the proper use of human resources”.*[930] Among the causes that greatly contribute to underdevelopment and poverty, in addition to the impossibility of acceding to the international market,[931] mention must be made of illiteracy, lack of food security, the absence of structures and services, inadequate measures for guaranteeing basic health care, the lack of safe drinking water and sanitation, corruption, instability of institutions and of political life itself. There is a connection between poverty and, in many countries, the lack of liberty, possibilities for economic initiative and a national administration capable of setting up an adequate system of education and information.

CHAPTER TEN

SAFEGUARDING THE ENVIRONMENT

IV. A COMMON RESPONSIBILITY

a. The environment, a collective good

466. *Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good,[979] destined for all, by preventing anyone from using “with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate — animals, plants, the natural elements — simply as one wishes, according to one's own economic needs”.*[980] It is a responsibility that must mature on the basis of the global dimension of the present ecological crisis and the consequent necessity to meet it on a worldwide level, since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator. “One must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the ‘cosmos’ ”.[981]

This perspective takes on a particular importance when one considers, in the context of the close relationships that bind the various parts of the ecosystem, *the environmental value of biodiversity*, which must be handled with a sense of responsibility and adequately protected, because it constitutes an extraordinary richness for all of humanity. In this regard, each person can easily recognize, for example, the importance of the Amazon, “one of the world's most precious natural regions because of its bio-

diversity which makes it vital for the environmental balance of the entire planet".[982] *Forests* help maintain the essential natural balance necessary for life.[983] Their destruction also through the inconsiderate and malicious setting of fires, accelerates the processes of desertification with risky consequences for water reserves and compromises the lives of many indigenous peoples and the well-being of future generations. All individuals as well as institutional subjects must feel the commitment to protect the heritage of forests and, where necessary, promote adequate programs of reforestation.

c. The environment and the sharing of goods

484. *The principle of the universal destination of goods also applies naturally to water, considered in the Sacred Scriptures as a symbol of purification (cf. Ps 51:4; Jn 13:8) and of life (cf. Jn 3:5; Gal 3:27). "As a gift from God, water is a vital element essential to survival; thus, everyone has a right to it".[1009] Satisfying the needs of all, especially of those who live in poverty, must guide the use of water and the services connected with it. Inadequate access to safe drinking water affects the well-being of a huge number of people and is often the cause of disease, suffering, conflicts, poverty and even death. For a suitable solution to this problem, it "must be set in context in order to establish moral criteria based precisely on the value of life and the respect for the rights and dignity of all human beings".[1010]*

485. By its very nature water cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others. The distribution of water is traditionally among the responsibilities that fall to public agencies, since water is considered a public good. If water distribution is entrusted to the private sector it should still be considered a public good. *The right to water*,[1011] as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right.

[755] John Paul II, Message for the 2003 World Day of Peace, 5: AAS 95 (2003), 343.

[1010] John Paul II, Message to Cardinal Geraldo Majella Agnelo on the occasion of the 2004 Brotherhood Campaign of the Brazilian Bishops' Conference (19 January 2004): *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 17 March 2004, p. 3.

[1011] Cf. John Paul II, Message for the 2003 World Day of Peace, 5: AAS 95 (2003), 343; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Water, an Essential Element for Life. A Contribution of the Delegation of the Holy See on the occasion of the 3rd World Water Forum*, Kyoto, 16-23 March 2003.

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**Papal Message Cites "inalienable right" to Clean Water
Catholic World News (CWN), Feature Stories
Saragasso, Jul. 15, 2008 (CWNews.com)**

In a message to an International Expo in Saragossa, Spain, Pope Benedict XVI (bio - news) has called for "clear national and international policies" to protect access to clean water.

The Pope's message was delivered to the Saragossa Expo by Cardinal Renato Martino (bio - news), the president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. That Council has prepared an exhibit for the Holy See at the Expo. The papal message said that the Vatican contribution was intended to "draw the visitor closer to the immense patrimony of spirituality, art, and social wisdom that is inspired by water and which has been safeguarded by the Catholic Church."

Access to water is "a universal and inalienable right," the papal message said. The statement expressed regret that "incursions and pressures from various social factors" have endangered the access to clean and drinkable water, and urged public officials to take appropriate action.

The Vatican's exhibit at the Expo is also designed to help call attention to the significance of water in the spiritual heritage of Christianity, the Pope said in his message. Visitors "should not forget the religious meanings that believers, and Christianity above all, have developed from it, giving it great value as a precious immaterial good that always enriches human life on this earth."

VATICAN CITY, 15 JULY 2008 (VIS) - Today, the Holy Father's message to Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, representative of the Holy See for the "Day of the Holy See" at the International Expo of Saragossa (Spain), was made public. The message, written in Spanish, is dated 10 July.

"I am pleased to send a message of faith and hope", the Pope writes, "to those who are visiting the 2008 Saragossa Expo dedicated to the complex themes tied to the importance of water for human life and the maintenance of equilibrium among the diverse elements of our world. The Holy See wanted to be present at the Expo with a pavilion that was jointly prepared with the archdiocese of Saragossa, which I thank for their generous commitment to promoting proper cultural initiatives that draw the visitor closer to the immense patrimony of spirituality, art, and social wisdom that is inspired by water and which has been safeguarded by the Catholic Church".

"We have to be aware that, regrettably, water - an essential and indispensable good that the Lord has given us to maintain and develop life -, because of incursions and pressures from various social factors, is today considered a good that must be especially protected through clear national and international policies and used according to sensible criteria of solidarity and responsibility. The use of water - which is seen as a universal and inalienable right - is related to the growing and urgent needs of those living in poverty, keeping in mind that the 'limited access to drinkable water affects the wellbeing of an enormous number of people and is frequently the cause of illness, suffering, conflict, poverty, and also death'".

"Those who consider water today to be a predominantly material good", the Pope concludes, "should not forget the religious meanings that believers, and Christianity above all, have developed from it, giving it great value as a precious immaterial good that always enriches human life on this earth. How can we not recall in this circumstance the suggestive message that comes to us from Sacred Scripture, which treats water as a symbol of purification and life? The full recovery of this spiritual dimension is ensured and presupposed for a proper approach to the ethical, political, and economic problems that affect the complex management of water on the part of all concerned, as well as in the national and international spheres".

Message on the Occasion of the Celebration of World Water Day 2007

Message of the Holy Father Benedict XVI Signed by Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone to the Director General of FAO on the Occasion of the Celebration of World Water Day 2007

Mr Jacques Diouf,

On the occasion of today's celebration of World Water Day, His Holiness Benedict XVI charges me to convey to you, Mr Director General, and to all the participants at this meeting respectful and cordial greetings and encouragement for your action in favour of those in the world who are suffering from a shortage of water.

In the context of the Decade 2005/ 2015, which the General Assembly of the United Nations has declared "The International Decade of Action: Water for life", this year's theme: Coping with water scarcity, gives us an opportunity to think about the importance of water as a source of life whose availability is essential for the vital cycles of the earth and fundamental for a fully human existence.

We are all aware of the difficulty of achieving at a world level the goal fixed by the international community to halve the number of people who are without access to healthy water and basic hygiene services by 2015, through the development, among other things, of integrated management plans and an efficient use of water resources.

However, we are likewise all convinced of the importance of not falling short of these goals, given the centrality of water in any process destined to foster the promotion of an integral human development.

Furthermore, appropriate investments in the sector of water and hygiene services represent a significant mechanism for accelerating economic growth and sustainable development, for improving human health and hygiene, for uprooting poverty and for combating the degradation of the environment.

Water, a common good of the human family, constitutes an essential element for life; the management of this precious resource must enable all to have access to it, especially those who live in conditions of poverty, and must guarantee the liveability of the planet for both the present and future generations.

Access to water is in fact one of the inalienable rights of every human being, because it is a prerequisite for the realization of the majority of the other human rights, such as the rights to life, to food and to health.

For this reason, water "cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others.... The right to water... finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right" (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, n. 485).

World Water Day is a precious opportunity to encourage the international community to identify effective ways to permit this basic human right to be promoted, protected and enjoyed.

In this regard, the sustainable management of water becomes a social, economic, environmental and ethical challenge that involves not only institutions but the whole of society.

It should be faced in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, that is, through the adoption of a participatory approach that involves both the private sector and above all the local communities; the principle of solidarity, a fundamental pillar of international cooperation, which requires a preferential attention to the poor; the principle of responsibility to the present generation and those to come, from which derives the consequent need to re-examine the models of consumption and production, often unsustainable with regard to the use of water resources.

It is in addition a responsibility that must be shared and that becomes a moral and political imperative in a world that has levels of know-how and technologies that are capable of putting an end to situations of water scarcity and to their dramatic consequences that affect in particular the regions with a lower income, in which access to water can often spark real conflicts, whereas it can become a motive for interregional cooperation wherever people appreciate a farsighted approach founded on hydrological interdependence that binds those who use the water resource in neighbouring countries in a joint agreement.

These are aspects, Mr Director General, that not only demand the responsibility of government leaders and politicians, but that challenge every individual. We are all called to renew our life-styles with an educational effort that can reassign to this common good of humanity the value and respect that it ought to have in our society.

Moreover, an educational effort of this kind could draw from many sacred texts of the traditional religions, such as the Bible, where water is symbolically a source and a sign of life and its presence is often associated with joy and fertility, assuming in addition a role of purification, renewal and rebirth.

On this World Water Day, the Holy Father invokes the Lord's Blessings on all those who are committed to reaching the goals concerning water that have been set by the international community. Mr Director General, I am honoured to convey to you this Message from His Holiness and ask you to accept the expression of my highest esteem.

From the Vatican, 22 March 2007
Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Secretary of State of His Holiness

For Pope Benedict, it's elemental: Safe water is of grave importance
By John Thavis, Catholic News Service
VATICAN LETTER Sep-7-2007

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- When Pope Benedict XVI turns on the tap in his Vatican apartment, it's a reminder that potable water is a precious resource in today's world.

The 109-acre Vatican City does not have its own water source, and it relies on Italy to furnish it with the estimated 5 million cubic meters of water consumed inside the Vatican each year.

Although that arrangement is guaranteed by a 1929 treaty, in recent years some Italians have been grouching about the increasingly high cost of keeping the Vatican from going dry.

When the treaty was drafted, of course, it didn't seem like a big deal to promise the Vatican an everlasting "adequate endowment of water." But today, things have changed: In many countries, water has become a sensitive environmental, political and economic issue.

In recent remarks to young people at an Italian Marian shrine, Pope Benedict said he was concerned about the equitable sharing of the world's water supplies and warned that water shortages could easily fuel conflicts.

Three days later the pope sent a greeting to an environmental conference in Greenland, saying the care of water resources was of "grave importance" for the entire human family.

Last March, on World Water Day, a papal message called access to water an "inalienable right" that needs to be protected through changes in lifestyle.

The pope's appeals were brief, but they reflected the Vatican's increasing interest in the moral, political and scientific aspects of the world's safe water supply.

In 2005, the Pontifical Academy of Sciences hosted an important meeting on water and the environment. Experts pointed out that more than 1 billion people lack access to adequate drinking water, and that climate changes -- including global warming and desertification -- could aggravate the situation for many populations.

A final statement from the academy's meeting looked at long-term strategies to reduce water pollution and ensure sufficient supplies. It also emphasized that, particularly in today's globalized economy, water must be treated as a fundamental resource that belongs to all.

In 2003 the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace prepared a major document, "Water, an Essential Element for Life." Last year, council officials presented an update at the Fourth World Water Forum in Mexico, stating: "Today common agreement exists that the survival of humanity and all species on earth depends to a great degree on the fate of water."

More specifically, the council said richer countries should do more to guarantee

adequate safe water in poorer countries, where supplies are at greatest risk and where investment in infrastructure is urgently needed.

The council's Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church emphasizes that water by its very nature "cannot be treated as just another commodity among many." It said water must be regarded as a public good even when its distribution is entrusted to the private sector.

That's an important point in an era when water is increasingly seen as a commodity. At the Pontifical Academy of Sciences conference, one expert said water -- the "blue gold" of the 21st century -- was seen today as an economic good by major corporations and international lending institutions.

The Vatican's interest in water resources goes beyond position papers. Last spring, Cardinal Renato Martino, president of the justice and peace council, told reporters how the issue came home to him when he visited Africa and saw people walking for miles to fetch their daily supply of safe water.

Often, the poor are paying for safe water -- and paying much more than well-off populations in the same country, according to a U.N. study in Kenya in 2006.

Unfortunately, access to clean water in Africa is not improving, according to a report earlier this year by the African Development Bank. It said Africa was unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goal of safe drinking water for 78 percent of the population by 2015.

The report said that in major African cities 50 percent of safe water is wasted, much of it through leaky pipes and general inefficiency.

The Vatican missionary news agency, Fides, recently published a lengthy report titled "Water, Source of Life for the Christian and for Humanity." Citing U.N. reports, it said lack of access to safe water was primarily a problem of resource management and not due to a shortage of fresh water.

It warned that U.N. experts foresee a worsening of the problem in coming decades, with some predicting that by 2050 half the global population will experience shortages of clean water.

The church's missionary personnel often see the problem from a different and closer perspective than desk-bound bureaucrats. In the Fides dossier, a missionary priest in Bangladesh identified only as "Father Rudy" brought it to a human level.

During recent heavy rains, the priest said, many Bangladeshis were collecting as much runoff water as they could, directing the flow from tin roofs to large terra cotta vases.

Why was rainwater in such strong demand?

Because arsenic contamination has been discovered in much of Bangladesh's water supply, the priest said.

At a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in London Aug. 29, experts illustrated

the extent of the arsenic problem, saying it has been underestimated worldwide. They said that in Bangladesh, the most affected country, hundreds of thousands of people were expected to die from the arsenic poisoning of the water supply.

The church tries to look at this and other environmental crises realistically but not pessimistically.

As Pope Paul VI told water experts in 1975, the Christian scientist should honestly address the problem, but with the confidence that nature has in store "secret possibilities" that are up to intelligence to discover.

END

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Water, An Essential Element for Life, An Update

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace A Contribution of the Holy See to the Fourth World Water Forum (Mexico City, 16 - 22 March 2006)

Introduction

In 2003, the Holy See Delegation to the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto prepared a document on water entitled WATER, AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT FOR LIFE. The text noted and highlighted ethical considerations which must underlie any reflection on the issue of water. The document, starting from the point that water plays a central and critical role in all aspects of life, analyzed water as a social good, an economic good and an environmental good while briefly treating a limited number of other issues impacting water. In concluding, the text highlighted the central role of the human being in caring for the environment and its constitutive elements.

Since 2003 the awareness and attention on the issue of water and sanitation has increased. There is greater recognition that water, particularly access to safe water, is at the root of some of society's pressing concerns. Today common agreement exists that the survival of humanity and all species on earth depends to a great degree on the fate of water.

The 4th World Water Forum, organized by the World Water Council together with the Government of Mexico, presents an opportunity to reflect attentively on the issue of water. Access to safe water and sanitation is important for the human family and thus of direct concern to the Holy See and the Catholic Church. The Holy See has chosen to present this update to its initial observations contributed on the occasion of the World Water Forum in Kyoto.

I. Water: A concern for all

"Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distances between different peoples and cultures."(1) This "togetherness", our ability to know almost instantly about the needs of others, challenges us to share their situation in life, even their difficulties. Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world due to poverty, both material and spiritual. The times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbours in need.(2)

The problem of water scarcity and water deprivation is experienced most dramatically by men and women living in poverty and often in the poorest countries. However, the concept of "family of nations" recalls that responsibility for the destiny of the less favored countries rests also with those more richly blessed. In a family, every member is responsible for each and every other member, the suffering of one becomes the suffering of all. The many children who die each year in poor countries due to the lack of access to safe water and sanitation are a loss for the future of the whole world and for humanity as a whole.

The challenge faced today in the water and sanitation sector is also an

opportunity, both from a social as well as an economic perspective. Properly addressed, this challenge has the possibility to unlock huge potential and to transform countless lives. Investments for safe water and sanitation can in their turn, be an engine for accelerated economic growth, sustainable development, improved health and reduced poverty. The requirements of developing countries in the water sector are at times so great that they cannot be resolved by developing countries themselves. Developing countries require the necessary know-how and technology along with developmental assistance of a scale sufficient to address major projects needed to guarantee access to safe water and sanitation for present and future generations. Development efforts in poor countries risk being in vain without a deep and worldwide engagement in favour of increased access to safe water and sanitation. In an authentic spirit of solidarity, rich countries need to foster increased assistance to be placed at the service of the poor.

II: Water: Fundamental good of God's creation

Water is a natural resource vital for the survival of humanity and all species on earth. As a good of creation, water is destined for all human beings and their communities. God intended the earth and all it contains for the use of all, so that all created things would be shared fairly by humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.⁽³⁾ Human beings, and the communities in which they live, cannot do without water since it corresponds to their primary needs and constitutes a basic condition of their existence. All depend upon the fate of water. Access to safe water and sanitation is indispensable for the life and full development of all human beings and communities in the world. Common good is understood as the social conditions that allow people to reach their full human potential. Water is a universal common good, a common good of the entire human family. Its benefits are meant for all and not only for those who live in countries where water is abundant, well managed and well distributed. This natural resource must be equitably at the disposal of the entire human family.

III: A human right to water

Water is much more than just a basic human need. It is an essential, irreplaceable element to ensuring the continuance of life. Water is intrinsically linked to fundamental human rights such as the right to life, to food and to health. Access to safe water is a basic human right. In a Message to the Bishops of Brazil in 2004, Pope John Paul II wrote, "as a gift from God, water is a vital element essential to survival, thus everyone has a right to it".

A human right is generally protected by internationally guaranteed standards that ensure fundamental freedoms for individuals and communities. It principally concerns the relationship between the individual and the State. In this regard, governmental obligations vis-à-vis the right can be broadly categorized as: to respect it, protect it and fulfill it. However, the international human rights system today lacks an explicit agreed acceptance of the right to access to safe water. Yet, a range of international treaties and declarations are invoked when stating that the access to a regular supply of safe water clearly falls

within the category of guarantees essential for securing an adequate standard of living.(4) All States Parties to such instruments have an obligation to ensure that the minimum essential level of any right is realized; in this case of the right to water, which is considered to mean non-discriminatory access to enough water to prevent dehydration and disease.

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recalls that the full realization of these rights has to be achieved progressively utilizing, to the maximum, available resources.(5) The principle recognizes the constraints of available resources and identifies a constant and continuing duty of the State to advance quickly and effectively towards full realization of the right.

Defining access to safe water as a human right is an important step in making this access a reality in the lives of many people living in poverty. A rights based approach places the human being at the center of development. Access to safe water is made a legal entitlement rather than a service or commodity provided on a humanitarian basis. Those least served can be better targeted and many of the discriminatory practices and inequalities be decreased. Communities that may have been vulnerable or marginalized can more easily enter into the decision-making processes. The means and mechanism to hold governments accountable for the access of their citizens to safe water will have been realized. Taking all this into consideration, a rights based approach would lead to acceleration in achieving basic and improved levels of access to safe water.

IV. Water: A key factor for peace and security

The vital importance of water to humanity means also that it is a strategic factor for the establishment and maintenance of peace in the world. Water is a dimension of what is referred to today as resource security. Conflicts have already occurred for control over water resources and others may come center stage the more water scarcity manifests its consequences on the lives of the human beings and their communities. It might be useful to take two examples: the Horn of Africa and the Middle East. The extreme drought in the Horn of Africa is intensifying ethnic tensions and conflicts for the control over the few, still available, water resources. This drought is threatening the food security of already poor populations and has lead to a food emergency situation. In the Middle East, the main problems with water are related to tensions among countries generated by water scarce environments, although often masked by ongoing political tensions. Water scarcity can present a clear danger to the internal stability of countries in the region.

Water can in so many ways become an indispensable element for the security of peoples and nations. To foster peace and an appropriate level of security in the current world situation, governments and international organizations will inevitably have to increase efforts to ensure that every person has access to safe water.

The current historical context, however, is not only a record of conflicts. There exists also a long, and in many ways deeper, history of water-related cooperation.(6) Focusing on the past experiences of such cooperation could represent an important road map or best practices framework for the promotion of a hydro-solidarity among countries and

communities. The lasting foundations of water-related solidarity are economic, environmental and strategic factors but also require a strong ethical basis.

Sharing water and sharing the benefits which water brings, in a mutually agreed, equitable and sustainable way is the key to preventing conflicts over this precarious resource whether at the local or international level, whether regarding major hydropower projects or neighborhood projects in local villages.

V. A "culture of water"

Water is central to life. However all too often water is not perceived as the luxury it really is, but is paradoxically wasted. This action of wasting water is morally unsustainable. Citizens in some countries are used to taking advantage of a privileged situation without thinking to the consequences of their wasting water on the lives of their brothers and sisters in the rest of the world. In other situations, water is lost or wasted due to an infrastructure that is old, badly or improperly constructed or inadequately maintained.

There is an urgent need to regain a "culture of water", to educate society to a new attitude towards water. In many ways our esteem for water has fallen. Traditionally water was revered and protected, even celebrated. Today it runs the risk of becoming a mere consumer product. In the face of waste, water cannot be treated as a mere product of consumption among others since it has an inestimable and irreplaceable value. Cultural traditions and societal values determine how people perceive and manage water. Using solely pricing mechanisms as a response to the wasting of water will not foster a culture of water and ignores the factor of the poor who also need water to live.

It is necessary to recall that all human beings are united by a common origin and the same supreme destiny.⁽⁷⁾ Water must therefore be considered a public good,⁽⁸⁾ which all citizens should enjoy, but within the context of the duties, rights and responsibilities which accrue to each person.

VI. Water Governance and Management: A question of justice and responsibility

Poor water management is a major contributing factor to most of the water problems evidenced today. Governance is therefore perhaps the most important requirement for solving problems of access to safe water and sanitation. The problems and challenges must be looked at by all: national governments, international agencies, the private sector and local communities. More attention must be given to coordination and cooperation between these actors at all levels. It must be noted that at present there is no single global organization mandated to coordinate and deal with water and its related issues among the community of nations.

An essential component of good management is community participation and ownership. Marginalized groups within the community need to be consulted about appropriate solutions to their needs. Traditional knowledge can be vital in planning water resources. More highly technological solutions can often ignore local knowledge regarding terrain and climate and more importantly the human component. Respect for the principle of subsidiarity should, therefore, be a part of all water management policy.

Management decisions that impact the distribution of water must also respond according to the criteria of justice. The human right to access to safe water and sanitation must be promoted in such a way that existing inequalities are reduced to the greater well-being of the least advantaged.

Public private partnership can play an important role in providing access to safe water, provided that the different stakeholders work together for a common objective: that of guaranteeing access to safe water and sanitation for all. This does not negate the principle role of the State in fostering the realization of the right to access to safe water and sanitation. Linkages between development strategies and issues of water allocation, supply, participation etc. must be understood clearly by decision-makers since such decisions have hidden implications for people living in poverty.

There are particular ethical issues involved in water management decision-making. Perhaps the most controversial and contentious of these issues is water pricing. At present people living in poverty often pay substantially more for access to safe water and sanitation than those more financially secure. The payment by the poor is not limited only to financial realm. Many times they pay more also in terms of physical effort and in terms of their health.

Good management of natural resources is clearly coupled with the requirement that users pay the true cost of services. It has been substantiated that when water is subsidized it tends to be wasted. If however it is acknowledged that access to safe water and sanitation is fundamental to the alleviation of poverty, then water and sanitation cannot be treated as a commodity among other commodities. Pope John Paul II recalled that there exist important human needs which escape the market logic⁽⁹⁾ and water is precisely one of these. It cannot be used solely as a means for profit because it is essential to the survival of the human person and thus cannot be transformed into a good reserved to the exclusive advantage of only those who can afford to pay for it.

VII. Natural disasters and risk management

In recent years the world has witnessed extreme and devastating natural catastrophes, which have caused a high number of deaths and enormous difficulties, especially among the poor. It is they who live in precarious conditions which increase their vulnerability to harmful natural occurrences and they who are most affected by price increases of natural resources in periods of scarcity and emergency. The need for ethical and moral considerations as regards actions to reduce the risks for those living in poverty cannot be overlooked.

In a spirit of solidarity, countries and international organizations should respond to the devastating natural events with generous support and aid. At the same time, it is of utmost importance to invest in the prevention of natural disasters. In fact, if human beings cannot avoid certain natural catastrophes, it falls to them to use their creativity and capacity for innovation to limit potential damages whether in time of drought, flooding or other disasters.

However, interference in one aspect of the ecosystem should not be undertaken without paying due attention both to the consequences of such

interference in other areas and to the well-being of future generations.(10) Natural disasters are not solely caused by nature, but also by an inconsiderate use and consumption of the earth's resources. The world's population should share equitably in the benefits of modern technological means for early disaster risk assessments. Disaster risk assessment is an integral component of the development plans and poverty eradication programmes and ways need to be found to break the vicious circle between poverty, environmental degradation and lack of preparation that turns natural hazards into disasters that destroy development gains. Poor countries, especially, should be encouraged, with the help of the richer ones, to invest in mitigation measures to reduce the consequences of floods and droughts. For example, water reserves to face periods of drought should be created. But all such initiatives should be implemented with an active involvement of the local communities. They should be accurately informed of the impacts on the environment and on their lives of any infrastructure built with the aim of reducing vulnerability to natural disasters. This is, indeed, an important element which contributes to the sustainable development of a country. The required large-scale nature of such activity will necessitate the provision of additional resources by developed countries while not reducing the small and medium projects funded in the water sector.

Conclusion

In facing the hard challenge posed by the water issue, no one should lose hope. Indeed, there are many signs of hope. The issue of access to safe water and sanitation has become one of the top priorities of the international system. Identification and increasing recognition of water as a component of our lives, health, livelihoods, social and economic well-being have taken place in response. The political will to tackle the water sector, which has been lacking for years, has begun to be evidenced. All men and women must be animated by the confidence that nature has in store secret possibilities which it is up to intelligence to discover and make use of in order to reach the development which is in the Creator's plan. This hope in the Author of nature and of the human spirit, rightly understood, is capable of giving new and serene energy to all of us.(11) The human being is the center of the concern expressed in this updated document. Solutions for access to safe water and sanitation should express a preferential love and consideration for the poor. It is for those that the water issue is crucial for life. The water issue is truly a right to life issue. It is mainly they who are deprived of the right to water, to health and to food. The human family must be served, not exploited. The primary objective of all efforts must be the well-being of those people - men, women, children, families, communities - who live in the poorest parts of the world and suffer most from any scarcity or misuse of water resources.(12)

(1) Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, § 30.

(2) Cf. *Ibid.*

(3) Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, §69.

(4) Cf. United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Supervisory body of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,

General Comment in 2002.

(5) Cf. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 2, §1.

(6) The Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Workshop entitled "Water Conflicts and Spiritual Transformation: A Dialogue", 13-15 October 2004.

(7) Cf. Pope John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, "Do Not Be Overcome By Evil, But Overcome Evil With Good", 1 January 2005, §6.

(8) Cf. The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, §485.

(9) Cf. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Centesimus Annus, §40.

(10) Cf. Pope John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace entitled "Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation", 1 January 1990, §6.

(11) Cf. Pope Paul VI, Speech to the Members of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, 19 April 1975.

(12) Cf. Pope John Paul II, Message to Jacques Diouf on the Occasion of the World Food Day, 13 October 2002.

Miscellaneous Statements from Catholic Authorities

“For water users living in poverty, the enormous hardship faced due to water supplies being neither sufficient nor safe is rapidly becoming a right to life issue.”

- Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2003

“Three major themes related to Catholic peacebuilding:

No peace without justice.

No peace without reconciliation.

No peace without integral human development.”

- CRS

(Pursuing the right to peace, 2000)



“Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, lowly, precious and pure.”

- CRS

(Pursuing the right to peace, 2000)

Artwork: Br. Michael Moran C.P. for the JPIC - Ecology Working Group, June 2003.

“Jesus Christ, having declared himself ‘Source of Living Water that springs forth eternal life,’ calls us to administer water with justice and equity in order to quench the thirst of all.”

- Bolivian Episcopal Conference
(2003, Art. 110)

Water and the Community of Life

Reflections from the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

In almost every community in every country where Maryknoll missionaries live and work, water is of urgent concern. With many other people of faith and good will, we are searching for a deeper understanding of our “sister” water and are calling for a more just distribution of water for all creation and its peoples.

Many in the Maryknoll family are already working specifically for water justice and ecological integrity:

In Bolivia, Maryknoll lay missionaries are engaged with neighbors in El Alto to stop the privatization of water services and have joined with people from all parts of the country to form a National Assembly for the Defense of Water, Basic Services and Life.

In Panama, the Maryknoll Sisters are pressing for action on a growing threat, hidden for the most part from local people, to drain an essential, large fresh water lake in order to expand the Panama Canal and facilitate mega-ship traffic.

In Tanzania, the available water supply is under serious strain due to severe, endemic drought, the rapid growth in population and increased cattle raising. To improve the drinking water supply, especially for health reasons, a Maryknoll priest, working with local villagers and District officials, has helped build windmills to pump clean water from sandy river beds into village centers, plus small dams and water catchments to hold the scant rainwater that falls. Another has encouraged the planting of trees in a desperately dry area to restore the water cycle and improve local agriculture.

In the Philippines, water is an important theme for study and reflection at the Maryknoll Sisters’ Ecological Sanctuary in Baguio.

In Kenya, a Maryknoll priest has set up irrigation projects to help small farmers grow better crops. He has also assisted in projects to dig boreholes and wells to bring clean water to the slum areas around Nairobi and provide water for local schools run by Kenyan Sisters. In Nepal, where water is abundant and even exported to India, Maryknoll Sisters point out that it is neither utilized well nor conserved due to many local and government problems.

Others have listened with care to the wisdom of indigenous peoples about water.

Through our work, our listening and our reflections, we have come to believe:

WATER is its own reality, a dimension of planet Earth, ancient and life-giving. It claims its own “right to be” by the very fact that it is! Oceans probably arose over four billion years ago from the condensation of the vapor in the atmosphere. All the water now in circulation has been here since the Planet was first formed, no more, no less. So water, having maintained its integrity over eons of time, has its own story to tell and plays its own role in the on-going cosmic venture. Life in all its expressions has emerged from water. It is generous gift and gracious friend. St. Francis named it our “sister.” To honor water in and of itself is to go deep into cosmic origins and the very mystery of creation. WATER is the common heritage of all creation as it is an essential dimension of the journey of life. No single species nor any region of Earth, no economic class nor political party, can claim water as its own. Its cycles and seasons have nurtured civilizations from

the beginning. Its deep mysteries have inspired spiritual practices in all the great religious traditions. In the presence of water, all creatures and all creation stand in need, side-by-side, dependent and grateful.

WATER is an “endangered species,” its purity, nurturing power, free-flow and availability for all under attack. Due to human activity, water is being poisoned by massive dumpings, polluted by excessive run-off. On every continent, it is dammed and re-directed, robbed from the poor, wasted by the rich and ignored as an essential element that belongs to all creation. The disparities between those for whom it is readily available and those who trek long miles to obtain a bucket are all too apparent. The competition only increases as the supply diminishes. Wars over access to water are already being waged, and the threat of more is on the horizon.

WATER is on the world agenda today as an “economic good,” a commodity that can be owned by powerful entities and distributed according to the highest bidder. Under this rubric, the privatization of water has grown into an immense industry and threatens communities worldwide. Bottled water, a privatization privilege for the powerful, has become ubiquitous. It is urgent to explore practices where public water management is accountable to the people and where the common good of the entire community, human and other-than-human, is served.

WATER is both a sacred gift and a central symbol in all religious traditions. For Christians, water is essential to the initiation ritual that invites a new person into the beloved community of all life and into the Christian family. The Bible abounds with water references, as do the sacred writings of all religions. Perhaps no other dimension of Earth life has such spiritual meaning as water. When water is neither pure nor clean its ability to carry such symbolic weight is threatened.

WATER concerns are front and center across the globe as enlightened peoples awaken to this crisis. Community groups and governments, international bodies and non-governmental organizations, scientists, ecologists, marine biologists -- all are raising alarm signals and moving aggressively to put remedial policies in place. The task is monumental and urgent.

To understand water in this light, as a member of the community of life on Earth, and to speak out of that truth challenges our assumptions, our thinking, our language, our practices and our policies. We struggle to be faithful to the change in consciousness this demands as we address this extremely important issue.

Our way forward

Studies and the experiences of Maryknollers around the world make it abundantly clear that the future of our sister water and the future of planet earth are inextricably linked. This sobering fact, the essential role that water plays in the life of the whole earth community, faces us all. It will not grow less urgent or disappear with a single well-designed plan or program initiated in one or another spot on the planet. Piecemeal repairs will not work unless they fit into the life-support systems of the whole – specifically, into the integrated system that water comprises throughout the earth. Leaders at every level of society, communities and individuals must awaken to the urgency of this matter and the magnitude of the task before us. We

need a complete transformation from a human community acting as despoilers of water to a worldwide community acting as lovers and friends of water.

As Maryknoll embraces this new vision of community and offers its gifts to help address the any problems that face our sister water on all continents, three principles have emerged to guide us. Other principles may well unfold as we continue to move forward.

Principle #1: For the common good

In every instance where water is endangered and Maryknoll is engaged in addressing the matter, we should be guided by Catholic social teaching on the common good, namely, that the “goods of the earth are meant for all.” No one person or group, no single species, has exclusive claims on earth’s bounty. Historically, we have understood this teaching to apply solely to the human community, i.e., that the common good demands the same rights to earth’s abundance for the poor as for the wealthy. It is this teaching that has been the foundation of our work over the years to ensure that the rights of the poor and their ability to carry on in a viable manner are protected.

However, as we better understand the full implications of our being members of a single, sacred earth community, we realize that the notion of the common good must be expanded to include all other expressions of earth life as well, human and other-than-human. We now grasp the reality that we do not exist in isolation from the rest of the natural world. Therefore, our concern for the common good must reach out and incorporate the “good” of water and forests, of wetlands and meadows, of oceans and atmosphere, of the bees and the birds, of plant and animal life ... all must be within the embrace of the common good. In fact, we might better broaden the expression to speak of the “common good and the good of the commons.” So, as we engage water issues in the future, we uphold this first principle and stand with all of creation in seeking to ensure the rights of the full community to this essential life source, sister water.

Principle #2: Participation

Over the years, we have taken seriously the Church’s social teaching that people have not only the right but also the responsibility to participate in shaping the institutions that control their lives. Whether in the political, economic, religious, educational, or social realm, participation is to be guaranteed to all those who are impacted by the policies, laws, actions of these systems. How often over the years has Maryknoll stood with communities, especially of people who are poor, in their demands for a place at the table where laws and rules that they must obey are created! We have raised our voices and given our energies to shape more just and inclusive societies.

But now, in light of our broadened sense of the earth community, our call for participation must go beyond the demands of the human community to ensure that the rights of the natural world are also represented at the table. Today we are being called to speak out, not only with impoverished people, but also for the waters of the Hudson, the Ganges and the Amazon Rivers, the Great Lakes of Africa and the U.S., the ocean waters as they flow freely throughout the planet. We join with guardians of the Appalachian mountains, the Serengeti, Indonesian forests, the Arctic glaciers, the great white bear, the disappearing songbird ... all those who are speaking up in the name of

the voiceless members of earth community, expanding the table and broadening the debate into new realms of consciousness and concern. Our work with sister water moves us beyond social participation to include ecological participation.

Principle #3: Accountability

In all that we as Maryknoll undertake to address concerns about water, the need for accountability is essential at every level and among all who are involved. This principle is of critical importance to the integrity of any undertaking. To insist that leadership answer to the people and the full community of life is non-negotiable. It requires continual consultation with those who have an investment in the outcome of the effort; the frequent testing of our own assumptions and plans; and an openness to the wisdom and insight of others. Accountability to the local community can restore the trust and confidence of the people and guarantee an outcome for the good of all creation.

Conclusion

In local communities around the world and at an international level,

- we will continue to nurture a new understanding of our relationship with sister water;
- we will support practices and policies appropriate to that understanding;
- we will promote “the common good/the good of the commons,” social and ecological participation and accountability at every level to the full community of life.

Many partners, faith-based organizations and others, have produced excellent resources on water :

- National Catholic Rural Life Conference http://www.ncrlc.com/water_commons.html
- La Red Vida <http://www.laredvida.org>
- UNESCO’s water webpage, <http://www.unesco.org/water/>
- Friends of the Earth, <http://www.foe.org/index.php>
- International Water Working Group, <http://www.citizen.org/cmep/water>
- “Twice as Thirsty: Women, Children and Water,” a document from Church World Service,
http://www.churchworldservice.org/pdf_files/EA/womenwater.pdf
- Theological reflection on water by Dr. Heather Eaton, KAIROS (Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives), <http://www.kairoscanada.org/e/ecology/water/reflectionWater.asp>

These links and additional resources are available on the website of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

www.maryknollogc.org (Ecology section).

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**Climate Change and the Call to Global Solidarity
Excerpts from CRS (draft) statement on climate change
August 27, 2008**

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Changes in climate are already leading to

- changes in rainfall patterns, which cause problems for farmers and for obtaining sufficient quantities of clean water
- increased severity and frequency natural disasters, especially cyclones, floods, and droughts
- shifts in range of some disease vectors, with implications for control of diseases like malaria and dengue fever.

.....

III. Response of the Church

The Church teaches us that creation is a gift from God, and that we have the moral obligation to exercise responsible stewardship for future generations. As the urgency of environmental issues has become more evident in recent years, Church leaders have increasingly raised their voices to call for effective responses, consistent with two overarching moral questions:

- how to exercise responsible stewardship over creation, especially as human capacity to alter the natural environment grows;
- how to ensure that care for creation provides for the common good, and integral human development based on justice.

There are numerous readings from scripture, as well as the lives and writings of the Saints, most notably St. Francis of Assisi, that affirm the centrality of care for God's creation within the Catholic tradition. Environmental references are found throughout the history of Catholic Social Teaching, and with Vatican II a shift occurred in which humans are understood as tenants rather than owners of the earth. The world is seen as a legitimate context for discovery of God, and the goodness of nature is intrinsic, not solely based on its utilitarian value to human kind. This new lens is evident throughout Papal statements. As far back as 1972 Pope Paul VI called for "respect for the biosphere" to preserve "a hospitable earth for future generations."

.....

Water

In many areas, water tables are dropping, making well digging and drilling more difficult. Surface water sources are drying up faster than in the past. Rainfall has become more erratic, with rainy seasons less predictable. Often when rain does come, it falls with much more intensity, increasing flooding and erosion. In parts of Africa drier pasture lands are diminishing, and communities are becoming more stressed economically.

Hydrological cycles like these are normal, but in the last few decades rainfall has not returned to the peaks it had in previous cycles. Staff expect these trends to continue.

People will need to drill and dig deeper as water becomes harder to find. This will increase costs of programs. Surface water will be harder to store, so microreservoirs and

community dams will need to be bigger. In areas prone to flooding, water points will need to be elevated so communities do not lose access to potable water during natural disasters.

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Through CRS' programs engaging people in the US, there are many opportunities to deliver the essential message that:

- a. Climate change is a moral issue that demands our action. While people in the US will suffer from the consequences of climate change, our constituency overseas will suffer more, without having reaped the economic benefits of industrialization. Care for the poor and acting for the common good are two principles of Catholic Social Teaching that obligate us to address this issue. Understanding the basic facts of climate change can help people understand this very complex issue and how it is part of their faith.
- b. Climate change is a global relief and development issue. CRS' emergency and development programs are already being affected by climate change, and will be increasingly affected in the future. The quality of our programs depends on being able to respond appropriately to the growing reality of climate change.
- c. Climate change is unquestionably a global solidarity issue. That is, what people do in the United States affects people far away. Education programs in the U.S. need to help people make that connection, and see themselves truly as part of one human family sharing –and caring for-- God's creation.
- d. There are things people in the US can do to help. Education programs can show people what they can do to
 - a. reduce your carbon footprint at home/parish/work
 - b. educate others
 - c. advocate with legislators, policy makers, business leaders
 - d. support programs to mitigate our contribution to climate change, and that help people overseas to adapt to its unavoidable consequences

WATER FOR ALL

Religious Working Group on Water

When the poor and needy seek water, I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. -- Isaiah 41: 17-18

The *Religious Working Group on Water*, with participation by a broad range of faith-based organizations, institutions, communities and agencies, calls on U.S. policy makers and inter-governmental institutions to work to ensure universal, sustainable access to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use. Water is a gift from God to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all people and the wider creation.

As faith-based organizations in the United States many of us partner with local communities throughout the world in their efforts to achieve the sustainable provision of safe, affordable water. Through our work we have seen that the crisis in water and sanitation hits the poor hardest. We lament the fact that those who can least afford it pay disproportionately more for water.

In view of the vast wealth of the United States, the U.S. government has both the capacity and the imperative to fully commit itself and its resources to exercising global leadership to ensure safe, affordable water for all members of the human community.

The need for adequate drinking water and sanitation is great. Around 1.2 billion people do not have access to safe water and 2.5 billion do not have access to improved sanitation. Two million children die each year from infections spread by dirty water and lack of access to decent sanitation. On average women in developing countries walk nearly four miles each day to fetch water. Clean water is key to every other aspect of development -- from children's education to economic growth and environmental sustainability.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) include the call to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015. But according to a 2006 World Health Organization report, the world is in danger of missing MDG targets for providing clean water and sanitation unless there is a dramatic increase in the pace of work and investment between now and 2015.

As people of faith, we affirm that water is a public trust and global public good. It is a misuse of God's creation to deny or improperly restrict access to clean water. Governments' have a duty to ensure that all individuals have affordable, equitable access to water and that no one because of financial constraints is cut off from sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic use.

The Religious Working Group on Water calls for U.S. Government action in four vital areas:

- Substantially increase Development Assistance Account funding for clean drinking water and adequate sanitation – as part of an overall increase in U.S. development assistance for sustainable human development and poverty alleviation world-wide. U.S. funding should increase – and not undermine -- the capacity of developing-country governments and local communities to manage water resources and to formulate and implement policies that expand access to safe water and sanitation in an affordable, equitable and sustainable manner.

- Ensure that water projects of the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank prioritize access to the most impoverished people and communities, and that IFI policies respect and ensure sustainable and affordable access for all people. Ensure that IFIs respect the right of countries to democratically determine their own water policies, and reject lending conditions that pre-empt such country decisions, for example, by requiring water privatization or similar policies.
- Oppose irresponsible and unjust practices of extractive industries that drain scarce water resources for profit and pollute clean water sources. Support the right of peoples to control their natural resources, protect their health and environment and maintain their communities and way of life.
- Fully support the human right to water, which for people of faith is rooted in God's gift of water to all people, and which entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.

Water is a symbol of life. The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life, an expression of God's grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation (Gen 2:5ff). It is a basic condition for all life on Earth (Gen 1:2ff.) and is to be preserved and shared for the benefit of all creatures and the wider creation. Water is the source of health and well-being and requires responsible action from us human beings, as partners and priests of Creation (Rom 8:19 ff., Rev 22). As churches, we are called to participate in the mission of God to bring about a new creation where life in abundance is assured to all (John 10:10; Amos 5:24). It is therefore right to speak out and to act when the life-giving water is pervasively and systematically under threat. – from the World Council of Churches' *Statement on Water for Life*, Feb. 2006.

Water is a primary building block of life. . . The Bible opens precisely with the image of the divine spirit hovering over the water at the creation of the universe. In the accounts of creation contained in the first two chapters of the Bible, it is from the midst of the waters that dry land is made to appear, while living reptiles and rich life forms are made to swarm the waters. It is also water that moistens the earth for other forms of life to appear. . . . The management of water and sanitation must address the needs of all, and particularly of persons living in poverty. Inadequate access to safe drinking water affects the well being of over one billion persons and more than twice that number have no adequate sanitation. This all too often is the cause of disease, unnecessary suffering, conflicts, poverty and even death. -- from *A Contribution of the Delegation of the Holy See on the Occasion of the Third World Water Forum* (Kyoto, 16th-23rd March 2003) by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace.

ENDORSERS:

Africa Faith and Justice Network
 Brethren Witness/Washington Office,
 Church of the Brethren
 Columban Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Office (USA)
 Conference of Major Superiors of Men
 Church World Service
 The Episcopal Church
 Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
 Food & Water Watch*
 Friends Committee on National Legislation
 Global Ministries of the United Church of Christ and Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 Institute Justice Team
 Sisters of Mercy of the Americas
 Justice, Peace/Integrity of Creation Office, Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

Leadership Conference of Women Religious
Lifewater International
Lutheran World Relief
Maryknoll Global Concerns
Medical Mission Sisters Alliance for Justice

Mennonite Central Committee –
Washington Office
National Council of Churches USA
NETWORK: A Catholic Social Justice Lobby
PLANT (Partners for the Land and Agricultural Needs of Traditional Peoples)
Presbyterian Church (USA), Washington Office
Quixote Center
SHARE Foundation: Building a New
El Salvador Today
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur
Justice and Peace Network
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
United Church of Christ
Justice & Witness Ministries
United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society
Washington Office on Africa

Asterisked organizations do not self-identity as “faith-based.”