

Statement on Water from National Council of Churches

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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.