

Episcopal Public Policy Network
For the Beauty of the Earth

Climate Change and Water

"We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water. Over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation. Through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life."

—Thanksgiving over the Water, Book of Common Prayer

Nearly every religion in the world incorporates the gift of water into its traditions, rites, scriptures and theology. Water is as essential to religion as it is for the very existence of life on this planet. Climate change will impact water, its availability, its use, its abundance and its scarcity. As Christians and Episcopalians, what is our role and responsibility in our stewardship of water?

What is the connection?

In the USA, large areas are already using substantially more water than can be naturally replenished. Around the world today, more than 1 billion people don't have access to clean drinking water and as many as five million – primarily children – die every year due to preventable water-related diseases. The connection is clear, in a world with acute regional fresh water demands, climate change will put greater burdens on developing nations and the international community.

This situation will only be further exacerbated by climate change scenarios of lower rainfall, increased evaporation and changed snowmelt patterns as sea levels rise salt water will intrude into fresh water aquifers. More than 40 percent of the world's population lives within 40 miles of coastlines. Sea levels are expected to rise as much 23 inches by the end of the century flooding coastal areas globally.

<http://www.episcopalchurch.org/climate>

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What is our responsibility?

The World Wildlife Fund reported that “per capita use of water in residential areas is estimated at 350 liters in North America and Japan, 200 liters in Europe and 10-20 liters in sub-Saharan Africa/” –making US citizens the most profligate water users on earth.

It is easy to say that our responsibility is to conserve water and find ways to be better stewards of the world’s water resources. But how is that connected to our identity as Christians and Episcopalians?

In her congressional testimony last June before the Senate Environment and Public Works committee on climate change, Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said,

“Before my ordination to the priesthood, I was an oceanographer and I learned that no life form can be studied in isolation from its surroundings or from other organisms. All living things are deeply interconnected, and all life depends on the life of others...Each one of us is connected to those who are just now beginning to suffer from the consequences of climate change and to those living generations from now who will either benefit from our efforts to curb carbon emissions or suffer from our failure to address the challenge which climate change presents.”

What can I do to be a better steward of water?

Stewardship of water starts by simply becoming aware of our own personal water consumption and learning about water issues in our communities. We then can adopt more sustainable practices that reduce our consumption of water. Finally we must be witnesses in our homes, parishes, communities and with policy makers in recognizing that we CAN make better choices.

Lenten Discipline: *Making a Change*

This week focus on your water consumption and work to use less water. Try turning off the water while brushing your teeth or taking a shorter shower. Remember to only run the dishwasher if it is completely full.

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