

Water and Justice

Purpose

This session introduces the concept of water as a justice issue. On both a national and global scale, no issue threatens our survival more than the availability of clean water and adequate sanitation. Participants will examine the current crisis, make connections with Catholic Social Teaching, and consider action steps both locally and globally. The session is designed for small group discussion.

Session at a Glance

- 7:00 p.m. Welcome and Icebreaker Question(s)
- 7:15 p.m. "So How Much Is Out There?" Water Activity
- 7:30 p.m. Why Water is a Justice Issue
Extend the Session: Water for Life (add 30-45 minutes)
- 7:40 p.m. Real Life Scenarios & Discussion
Extend the Session: Meet The H2O Project (add 15-20 minutes)
- 8:05 p.m. Closing Prayer
- 8:20 p.m. Announcements and Refreshments
- 8:30 p.m. Good Night!

Extend the Session: Water for Life (30-45 minutes)

Order the 19 minute DVD entitled, *Water for Life*, through Catholic Relief Services: http://education.crs.org/stewardship/water_for_life/. The video is free and has a downloadable study/discussion guide as well.

Extend the Session: Meet The H2O Project (15-20 minutes)

Introduce the group to the H2O project (<http://www.theh2oproject.org/>) or other initiative and follow-up the meeting with some kind of service action step.

Materials Needed

- Glass pitcher (must hold 1 gallon); large groups might need more than one pitcher
- Small ("Dixie") cups, one for each participant
- Small container to hold 1 ounce of water; something that measures baby formula is a good idea
- One or two small bowls of holy water (more if your group is large)
- Color picture of Earth viewed from space; a downloadable image is available at: <http://www.fourmilab.ch/cgi-bin/Earth>.
- Bible
- Newsprint and marker
- Pens, one for each participant
- **Handout 1, Connecting Catholic Social Teaching with Life**, for each participant
- **Handouts 1-4, Real Life Scenarios**, each small group member will get a copy of one of the scenarios
- Downloadable education resources: (see #1 in Prepare in Advance) <http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/factsheet.html> <http://education.crs.org/stewardship/water-for-life-summary.pdf> http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060322_mexico-water_en.html
- Downloadable summary of Catholic Social Teaching (see #2 in Prepare in Advance) <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/projects/socialteaching/excerpt.shtml>
- Laptop computer and projector, if available
- "Green World" by Bryan Sirchio (*JusticeWalkers*); available at www.sirchio.com or check iTunes for availability
- Lyrics to "Green World," available at: http://www.sirchio.com/lyrics/z_jwalkers_006.html

High tech option: Download the lyrics and put into PowerPoint to project during the closing prayer. You will need a laptop computer and LCD projector.

Low tech option: Download the lyrics and make copies for the participants.

- CD player

Prepare in Advance

1. Download all education resources and read through them. There's a tremendous amount of information available. Use these to become familiar with the justice issue of water.

2. Download and print copies of the summary of Catholic Social Teaching for each participant. *Note to Leader:* Remember that in order to use copyrighted material for educational purposes, it should be collected and destroyed after the session.

3. Download and print (in color) the photo of Earth as viewed from space (any image will work).

4. Invite two participants to proclaim a short reading during the closing prayer. The first reader will proclaim Genesis 1:27-31, and the second reader will proclaim Genesis 2:8-15 (verses 10-14 could be omitted).

7. Set up tables for refreshments and sign-in. Have one or two people at the sign-in table with a check-in sheet and nametags. **Hospitality is important:** As the leader, do not use the gathering time before the session begins to take care of last minute preparations. Spend the time moving among the participants, greeting and speaking with them.

7. Create a prayer table with the earth photo, pitcher of water filled with one gallon, Bible opened to Genesis 2, and the small bowls of holy water

8. Post the two icebreaker questions on newsprint: "What is my favorite water memory?" and "What water memory had the greatest impact on my life?"

Session Outline

Welcome and Icebreaker Question(s) (15 minutes)

Gather the group into a large circle (or into small groups) and welcome them to the session.

Explain to the group that we'll be using two questions to get started. As you point to the questions on the newsprint, start to clear your throat and cough. Reach for a cup of water and take a long, cool drink:

Nothing like a refreshing cup of water, right? Each of us has had some memorable moments involving water. Take a minute and recall your favorite water memory.

Give each participant an opportunity to share some vital information—name, school, etc.—and a water memory. If your group is large, invite participants to form pairs and share their answer to the question.

Once all have shared, invite them to reflect on the second question. Examples may include: seeing Niagara Falls and being impressed with the awesome power of water, a baptismal memory and the saving power of water, or being part of a food fast and only drinking water. Maybe some have traveled and seen examples of suffering because of inadequate water. Allow time to share but be aware of time; not everyone will have a memory to share.

“So How Much is Out There?” Water Activity (15 minutes)

Gather the participants at the prayer table, and distribute a small cup to each participant:

Tonight we’re reflecting on water as a justice issue—something with moral and spiritual implications. Notice the beautiful photo of our earth taken from a satellite in space.

Pass the photo around.

When you view the planet from this perspective, you really see how much of the surface is covered with water—about 75% to be exact.

This pitcher is filled with one gallon of water; it represents all the water on earth—salt and fresh. I invite you now to come forward and pour into your cup the amount of water that you think represents the amount of fresh water available for us to use.

Note to Leader: If your group is large, you may need to use two half-gallon pitchers or four quart pitchers to keep this action moving along.

Allow time for each person to come forward and pour some water into his/her cup. Do not make any comments about the amount of water poured; allow the action to happen. Once each person has a cup filled with some water say:

Even though of the earth is covered with water, only 2.5% of all that water is fresh water, and guess what? Most of that fresh water is located in the ice caps. That leaves less than 1% of all the earth’s water for humans to use—that’s about one ounce of water (hold up the container with one ounce of water).

But there’s more ... of that one ounce of water, we use 70% for agricultural irrigation (water needed to grow food). So in the end, we have a little more than ounce to use for drinking, bathing, cooking, etc. And when you consider that right now around 1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water, you can get a sense that water is truly a justice issue that will only grow in importance. In fact, it’s so important that the United Nations has declared the years 2005-2015 the “Water for Life Decade.”

Invite the participants to slowly drink their cup (or drop) of water, savoring the refreshment of God’s free gift!!

Why Water is a Justice Issue (10 minutes)

Using the downloadable resources, give a brief presentation of why water is a justice issue for believers. Include the following points:

- We were baptized in water as a sign of our new life in Christ. Christ is the living water that brings life to all.
- Genesis 2 reminds us that we are “stewards of creation.”
- To be a steward means that we protect and preserve the gifts God has given us.
- God’s gifts are freely offered and should be freely given. Water distribution is becoming more and more controlled by for-profit companies—especially in developing countries. This creates serious problems when those companies raise rates or completely cut off water delivery to needy individuals who cannot afford the rates.
- Those who are most poor and most vulnerable are the ones who are most at risk.
- Limited access to clean, safe drinking water affects over 1 billion people.
- Access to adequate sanitation affects 2.6 billion people.
- Our faith calls us to act.
- The social teaching of our Church calls us to act.

Scenarios and Catholic Social Teaching (25 minutes)

Divide participants into four small groups. Give each person a copy of Themes of Catholic Social Teaching (which you downloaded from the Internet), and give each group a copy of **Resource 1, Connecting Catholic Social Teaching to Life**. Finally, give each group one of the scenarios, **Handouts 1-4**.

Instruct each group to read through the scenario and make connections with as many of the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching as possible. Use the example on **Handout 1** as a guide. Allow ten minutes for this task.

Note to Leader: Some connections will be quite obvious. Encourage the young people to make creative connections as well. A connection with each of the seven themes is certainly possible.

Facilitate a large group discussion, inviting members of the small groups to share the connections they made between their scenario and the seven principles.

Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

Assemble the group around or facing the prayer table. If unable to project the lyrics, distribute copies of the lyrics to "Green World." Dim the lights to create a mood for prayer.

Gather

Prayer Leader: *(begin with the Sign of the Cross)*

Creating and Saving God,
All that is good comes from You, and we rely on the gift
of your creation for our survival. Open our eyes to the fragile beauty
of this earth, and energize us to be true stewards of all Your gifts.
We make our prayer through the one who showed us how to live—
Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Listen

Invite Reader 1 to proclaim Genesis 1:27-31. After a brief pause, invite Reader 2 to proclaim Genesis 2:8-15 (verses 10-14 could be omitted). Allow a few moments for quiet reflection.

Respond

Display the lyrics to "Green World" (or direct the students to their copies). Introduce the song and ask each person to listen closely to the lyrics and come up with one thing he/she could do to be a better steward of our precious gift of water. Play the song.

Go Forth

If time allows, invite students to share their action step with someone near them. Close with the following blessing:

Note to Leader: The blessing could be led by one or three teens.

Leader 1: As we bring this session to a close, let us gather ourselves together and become aware of God's presence in our midst (long pause). The response to each blessing is "AMEN" (pause...) Let us pray ...

Leader 2: (with gusto!!) Saving God, through the waters of baptism you brought us from death to life, may our lives be a living witness to the new life we have received.

ALL: Amen!

Leader 3: (with gusto!!) Gracious God, your gift of water is meant for all. Inspire those in power to keep our water clean and available for all.

ALL: Amen!

Leader 1: (with gusto!!) God of Justice, you have given each of us the responsibility of caring for your creation. May we have the courage to walk gently on the earth and preserve our planet for generations to come.

ALL: Amen!

Leader 2: I invite you now to come forward and bless yourself with the water of our salvation (take some holy water and bless yourself) and after you've made the sign of the cross on yourself, offer to one another a sign of Christ's peace.

Announcements and Refreshments (10 minutes)

Make any announcements that are needed. Encourage everyone to recycle their cups, if possible. Avoid using bottled water as part of the refreshments.

Websites in this session were accessed successfully on May 30, 2008.

This session was written by Anthony Camino, Director of Campus Ministry, Notre Dame College, South Euclid, Ohio.

Resource 1

Connecting Catholic Social Teaching to Life

Detail from Scenario Theme to Connect Describe the Connection

Example: Private companies are controlling the water supply. Example: Rights and Responsibilities Example: Every person has a right to things required for human dignity. Water is definitely one of those rights!

Handout 1

Scenario One

Maria lives in a small village in Bangladesh. Last year, massive floods ravaged her village destroying their only natural water source and contaminating others nearby as raw sewage ran throughout the streets. Many in her village have become sick or died due to water-born illnesses.

Each day, members of the village – mostly young women and girls – make an 8 hour journey to retrieve clean drinking water. Occasionally, there is a vehicle that can drive the women (for a price) but usually the trip is made on foot over unpaved, rocky terrain.

If the trip is made during the day, the women are away from their families and the girls must miss school. If the trip is made during the evening, the dark roads are not safe, and many women report accounts of sexual assault and rape.

Handout 2

Scenario Two

In the occupied Palestinian territory of Gaza, 10 year-old Abu draws a picture of how he can save water and use it more carefully. Like most Palestinian children in Gaza, Abu lives on far less than the recommended daily minimum amount of 20 liters of clean water because high levels of salt and sewage have contaminated the groundwater.

Schools and clinics have insufficient water storage and water sanitation systems and much of the infrastructure has been destroyed or is in disrepair. Children are at risk for infection and have an increased risk of contracting diseases such as diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid.

Both water scarcity and water pollution are problems in Gaza where 1.4 million people lack access to clean drinking water. Few people have running water in their homes; most gather water from community wells.

(Information gathered from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/oPt_39197.html.)

Handout 3

Scenario Three

In a tribal district on the east coast of India, intense heat and low water levels have dried up the only water source in the area. As the climate continues to change, the river runs dry each summer leaving the residents having to dig for useable water.

In a process called “chahala,” tribal members dig holes in the dry riverbed searching for clean water. It takes two hours to fetch water each time, and people must come to the dry river 4-5 times a day to dig.

People are suffering from disease due to unsafe drinking water. Members of the tribe claim the local government is indifferent to their situation, but the state assures them that they are taking action to provide clean drinking water.

(Information gathered from <http://carbon-based-ghg.blogspot.com/2008/05/water-scarcity-forces-indigenous-tribes.html>.)

Handout 4

Scenario Four

In a slum settlement town in Pakistan, men and young boys rise each morning before dawn to illegally tap clean water from the main supply line feeding the city of Karachi. Using plastic tubing, pumps, and electric cords, members of these squatter families labor in the dark illegally tapping electricity to power the pumps that deliver the clean water to storage tanks in their homes.

Because the work is difficult and the equipment is heavy, the job usually falls to the youngest male in the house who is able to carry the load. In the absence of males, women and girls must take over the job. Many of the boys must drop out of school to provide for their families or find ways to complete their course work while getting up at 3 a.m. in the morning to gather the water.

Over 8 million people in the city live without running water and proper sanitation. When water supply in the main pipe is low or turned off, residents are forced to purchase water from “scalpers” who own numerous storage containers and sell water to those who are desperate.