

Waters of Life

UN Millennium Development Goal No 7: ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Target: To integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources.

Halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

Context

Water is essential for life... Air is essential for life...

Food is essential for life...

Without any one of these three elements we die.

They are priceless and precious. We reverence them as religious symbols and sacraments. We bless water and name it Holy. In our everyday lives, however, we seem unaware of the intrinsic value and giftedness of water.

Water is a matter of life and death in many dry countries, including Australia, where many explorers and tourists have perished in the vast outback. The Murray-Darling River system is in a perilous state and is the cause of much friction among the States of Australia.

Throughout the world it is predicted that future conflicts will be about water access in sub-Saharan Africa and in the dry regions of South America, where glaciers are melting due to higher temperatures. These melting waters are the source of life for people in places like Peru. In the Gaza strip the average water allowance for a Palestinian citizen is five litres per day.

In 2007 the ABC encouraged listeners to take the 40 Hour Drought Challenge which was modeled on the 40Hour Fast undertaken by many people each year to highlight World Hunger.

The 40 Hour Drought Challenge, emphasized the difficulties in limiting personal water use to the prescribed 40 litres over a 40 hour period and provided great insights into the amount of precious drinking-grade water that is needlessly used each day for non drinking purposes.

Thankfully systems are becoming available that enable us to re-use and redirect water in our homes. Enlightened Councils and engineers are devising ways to use storm water and recycled water for use in gardens, sewerage systems and industry.

Meanwhile many households, including our Mercy communities, are devising homegrown methods of water conservation. If you have a way of saving water, why not share it with Mercy Matters so that others can include it as a way of life

As a guide to our current water usage, view the chart used for the 40Hour Drought. Perhaps you would like to try it as well.

Can you manage with just 40 litres of water in 40 hours?	Estimated usage... Litres	Amount of water used in 40 hours
Washing face or hands	2	
Taking a shower (standard shower head)	80	
Taking a shower (low flow shower head)	50	
I used a bucket	10	
Taking a bath-lots of water	150	
Brushing teeth (water running)	8	
Brushing teeth (water turned off)	1	
Flushing the toilet (single flush toilet)	11	
Flushing the toilet (Dual flow toilet)	9.5	
I didn't flush	0	
Shaving	7	
Getting a drink	0.5	
Cooking a meal*	7	
Washed vegies in a bowl*	2	
Washing dishes by hand*	20	
Dishwasher old*	36	
Dishwasher new*	15	
Laundry old washing machine*	160	
Laundry new washing machine*	110	
Laundry front loading new*	60	
Other		
Total amount of water used		

(Chart: * Divide the amount of water used by the number of people to get the amount you used. <http://www.abc.net.au/water/40hourdrought>)

From: Institute Specific Issues Committee, Eco-Justice (Sisters Claudette Cusack, Mary Dennett, Marie Farrell and Kate McGrath) The Committee warmly invites your response to the article or the issue.

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UN Millennium Development Goal No 7: ENSURE ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

- Almost half of the world's population face a scarcity of water
- More people are using improved sanitation facilities, but meeting the target will require a redoubling of efforts
- In developing regions, nearly one in four uses no form of sanitation
- Though access to improved drinking water has expanded, nearly one billion people do without
- Women shoulder the largest burden in collecting water

A Global Perspective on Water

Maude Barlow, from Canada is a Senior Advisor on Water at the United Nations recently visited Australia. Her recent book, *Blue Covenant*, depicts the situation very graphically.

The following is an excerpt from an address she gave to the U.N. General Assembly in April 2009.

"The water crisis is perhaps the most urgent ecological and human threat of our time and the first- and perhaps the most devastating- face of climate change. More children die each year of water-borne disease than from war, HIV/AIDS and traffic accidents combined.....the global crisis is getting worse by the day and threatening millions more people every year.

One of the fiercest disputes in the world is who gets to make allocation decisions over the world's dwindling water supply. Is water a commodity to be put on the open market for sale like... shoes... or is it part of the heritage of all humans and other species to be protected as a commons for the future? Who will determine who has access...?

Will we allow the creation of "water banks" where water is traded on the open market to those who can pay? Who will protect the needs of those who cannot? ...everyone has the right to clean safe water regardless of ability to pay. A UN right to water covenant would establish once and for all that no one anywhere should be allowed to die or forced to watch a beloved child die from dirty water simply because they are poor.

Finally... we must leave enough water in aquifers, rivers and lakes for their ecological health...

We, none of us, can live on a dry planet.

The answer to the current inequitable access to water is water justice, not charity."

United Nations:

http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfi/documents/MEDSE_Barlow_en.doc



Photo: Sister Carmel Heagerty RSM

Are you seeking information or discussion on this critical issue?

The **Mercy Justice Conference: 'Embrace the Other and Welcome Difference...'** 6-8 November 2009 has an outstanding line-up of speakers including **Tim Flannery**, *Professor, Macquarie University and 2007 Australian of the Year.*

Registration Form and Details: <http://www.mercy.org.au/mercyinaction/default.cfm?loadref=197>

Reflection

Reflection: Adapted from "Miriam's Well"

So Miriam stood with Zipporah under the starry sky and looked to the heavens pleading: 'Lord God of Israel, hear the cry of your people...you led us from slavery to suffer more cruelly the vanishing of the waters that give life.' Then slowly water began to bubble up from a deep spring far beneath the earth to form a pool, and from the pool a river... Miriam knew that God's compassion was flowing through her... that as long as she lived she would call on the wellsprings to heal the thirst of her people, She knew that through the ages her daughters would be 'Keepers of the Well'... Miriam's name began to mean not 'mara' (bitter) but 'mer' (beloved)...

Cited in Mary C. Grey, *Sacred Longings: The Ecological Spirit and Global Culture* (2004), 23 26.

Action

Actions for the Planet

New challenges for you.

- Take the 40 Hour Drought Test.
- Install a rainwater tank.
- Use public transport instead of your car at least once a week if you can.
- Consider drought tolerant plants, which will continue to grow without excess water use
- Use deep mulch and add compost to your soil. These add nutrients and help to retain moisture and reduce evaporation.
- Use only as much water as you need in the kettle to cut your electricity costs at the same time.