

Dive in to Water Justice with UUSC's Water Justice Praxis

Water injustice is a grim reality around the world, including in the United States. With the Water Justice Praxis, congregations can study and act on local and international water-justice issues, as they learn about what courageous people are doing to make sure that everyone has access to safe, sufficient, affordable water to meet their daily needs.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and look ahead to a world impacted by climate change and increased water crises, we know that the burden of insufficient supplies of safe water and inadequate access to water will continue to fall disproportionately on women, girls, and low-income communities. But people are organizing and taking action to protect their human right to water.



Take Grace Munyai, an unemployed 43-year-old resident of Soweto, South Africa, who lives in a household of 20. Under her local utility, Johannesburg Water, Grace and her family received less than five gallons of water per person per day, even less than under apartheid. Yet South Africa's 1996 constitution is the first in the world to affirm that all citizens have the right to water. With UUSC's assistance, Grace and her neigh-

bors organized in the Coalition Against Water Privatization and won a landmark court case in April 2008, reaffirming their right to water and setting clear standards for water access.

People in the United States also suffer from lack of access to safe, sufficient, affordable water. In July 2007, UUSC partner Massachusetts Global Action (MGA) began a groundbreaking project on the right to water for Boston residents. MGA's research identified a disturbing trend: in 2003, there were 664 water shut offs in Boston households; and in 2006, that number jumped to 1,923, mostly affecting people in poor neighborhoods. MGA is now working with Boston city councilors to hold Boston Water and Sewer to account.

In March 2006, when local access to water in Barnstead, N.H., was threatened by a water-bottling firm, town residents organized with the coalition "Save our Groundwater" and passed a local human right to water:

"We the People of the Town of Barnstead declare that we have the duty to safeguard the water both on and beneath the Earth's surface, and in the process, safeguard the rights of people within the community of Barnstead, and the rights of the ecosystems of which Barnstead is a part..."



689 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139-3302
www.uusc.org

The **Water Justice Praxis**, described on the reverse side of this flyer, will be available in spring of 2009 for congregations that want to participate in a pilot project. Sign your congregation up! For more information, contact UUSC at righttowater@uusc.org.

UUSC Water Justice Praxis Preview

The **UUSC Water Justice Praxis** is an adult/young adult religious education and social action tool, complete with videos, action guide, and companion small group ministry modules. The Water Justice Praxis is flexible – it can be used for an evening study course in four sessions or a one-day workshop. Suggestions for family activities include taking a group fieldtrip to the local water reservoir. The praxis was written in consultation with religious educators and will be ready to be tested in pilot congregations in spring 2009.

The human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, accessible, affordable, safe, and acceptable water for personal and domestic use.

Access to *Sufficient* amounts of water every day ...

- The guideline for minimum water consumption is 10–15 gallons per person per day, for drinking, cooking, washing, laundry, toilets, and growing food. Does every one in your community have access to this amount of water every day?
- Are there any public drinking fountains for the homeless in your community?
- What is the water source for your household water? Where is it? Take a tour of the water facility in your town, if you are on public water. If you are on a well, figure out where your water comes from. Find it on the map!
- Do you drink tap water? Why or why not?
- What happens in an emergency? Who is responsible for getting the community water? Who is responsible for telling the community how to respond to a water emergency?

***Affordable* water services for everyone in your community ...**

- What happens to someone who can't afford to pay his or her water bill in your community? Their sewer bill? Is the water shut off? Is there a tax lien put on the property?
- Who controls the water and sanitation system in your area? Is it public? Private?
- What is the rate structure for water services? How much does water cost? What is in your water bill? What does it pay for? Who sets the rates for water services?
- Do business users pay the same rates as household users? Who are the biggest water users in your community? Are their rates subsidized?
- How much is a gallon of water? Do the bottled water challenge. Compare the price of tap water (on average) with the price of popular bottled waters.

***Safe* water for all ...**

- Who makes the decisions about what is “safe” (potable) water in your community? For your well water?
- What is “safe water” in your area (lead contamination, amount of chlorine allowed, etc.)?
- What rights do people have to know how safe their water is? Who is supposed to tell us whether or not it is safe?
- If you know that your water is not safe, what can you do? What are your rights?

To get involved in the UUSC Water Justice Praxis, please contact righttowater@uuscs.org.



RIGHT TO WATER