Sustaining Waters

Water is a symbol for life and renewal. The scriptures speak of those who thirst for righteousness and Christ as a living fount from which people may drink and thirst no more. God worked through Moses to part the Red Sea and lead the Hebrews to safety. We come to the baptismal font recognizing God's abounding grace and proclaiming our faith. Water abounds as a source of life.

Water is essential for life, yet too much or too little water can act as a force of destruction. The global community has been impacted by floods, tsunamis, hurricanes, and cyclones in which too much water has swamped and devastated communities. Drought and water privatization have also left many without the water they need for daily living. Together as Presbyterians seeking to live as global disciples, we can responsibly use our water resources and help protect water supplies around the world. This resource is aimed at assisting Christians to be good stewards of water.

PRESBYTERIAN HUNGER PROGRAM
PC(USA)

pcusa.org/justliving

Clean Waters

After creating the heavens and the earth, God created waters and dry land. Water abounds in the world, covering more than 70 percent of the earth's surface, and yet only 2.5 percent exists as fresh water. Polluted waters poison environments and people, terminating rather than sustaining life. Embodying God's call to care for all life, especially those who are the least among us, requires protecting fresh water supplies around the world. We are Christ's hands and feet in this world and can glorify God through water preservation.

Quick Fixes: Saving water is as easy as turning off the tap. Turn off faucets while not in use, including while you shave, brush your teeth, or lather up in the shower. If you have a lawn or garden, water during the early morning or late evening, when less water will be lost to evaporation. Fix leaky faucets and install low-flow nozzles and shower heads to reduce your water consumption, lower your water bill and save unnecessary gallons from being drawn and processed from local water supplies. Other water-saving tips can be found online.
https://wateruseitwisely.com/100-ways-to-conserve-water/

Gray Water: Gray water is water that goes straight down the drain and is not used, like the water that comes from the tap before it is hot enough for a shower. Collect gray water in a bucket and reuse it for other needs. Use gray water to rinse dishes, mop floors, wash a car or water plants. Add it to toilet reservoirs after flushing to save gallons every week.

Rainwater: Collecting rainwater from roof runoff to water your garden or houseplants is an excellent way to save on water use. Rainwater collection barrels may be obtained from some municipal governments or from home and garden centers.

Cleaning Water: By running only full loads of laundry or dishes in a washing machine or dishwasher, you will save many gallons each year. When washing dishes by hand, fill one side with rinse water rather than keeping the water running for rinsing dishes. Buckets are great for minimizing water usage while washing produce, mopping, and washing a car.

Grass and Landscaping: If you live in a house with grass or landscaped areas, plant species that will most efficiently handle water in your area. Native species, wildflowers, and certain plants consume less water than others. Planting in areas where water is efficiently absorbed will help reduce consumption. Using a drip irrigation system or a sprinkler system with a rain shutoff will save many gallons each year. Avoid the use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers to prevent water supply contamination and unintended side effects.

Storm Drains: Storm drains are found on the side of roads and exist to guide excess rainwater off the road and into local rivers, lakes, and oceans. Occasionally these drains route water to treatment facilities before the water reaches other destinations. Keep water clean by unclogging storm drains in your area. Report drains that are not marked with signage indicating direct connection to water supplies to help prevent chemical dumping. Never pour oil, car fluids, or other chemicals into a storm drain because they can interfere with local water quality.

Chemical Disposal: All chemicals, including prescription drugs, need to be properly disposed of to prevent leaching into groundwater supplies. TVs, cell phones, computers, and all other electronic equipment contain heavy metal components that require recycling. Batteries, especially rechargeable and large batteries, should be recycled or taken to a disposal facility. All flourescent bulbs, including Compact Florescent Bulbs (CFLs), contain small amounts of mercury that need special disposal. Household chemicals should be handled with care and disposed in the safest manner possible. *Earth911.com* offers some great guidelines and tips for disposing of many chemicals.

Septic Tanks: Many communities are not connected to a municipal sewer system. In these locations septic tanks are used to collect human waste and gray water. It is important to maintain proper septic health in your tank through proper maintenance. Disposing of chemicals in a septic system is discouraged because they can disrupt biological balances and ruin the tank's efficiency. Poorly maintained tanks can create unpleasant backup, the overflow from which can contaminate local environments.

Abundant Waters

All life requires water. God sustained the Hebrews on their long journey through the wilderness with morning dew and artesian wells. Jesus encountered a Samaritan woman and asks her for water from a well. If she had not shared water as she did, Jesus would have remained thirsty, but with the water Jesus teaches about the Kingdom of God. Today water is abundant for some and scarce for others. Multinational corporations are privatizing water supplies, removing public control of water, and threatening to turn water into a privately traded and managed commodity. Public water systems help ensure public access to water for all people while private water supplies may be sold to whoever can pay for water access at the current price. In caring for all people we are called to serve by maintaining access to basic commodities such as water.

Tap Water: For most people in the United States, locating potable water is as easy as turning on the tap. Tap water offers a safe, clean, and inexpensive option for drinking water. Verify your water quality and safety by reading your annual water report. Most of these reports are available online at *https://ordspub.epa.gov/ords/safewater/f?p=ccr_wyl:102.* Tap water is regulated by the EPA and stringent guidelines, so it is generally safe to drink without further filtration. If you have any concerns about your water quality or safety, contact local officials and consult your annual Consumer Confidence Report on water quality.

Bottled Water: Bottled water is an unnecessary expense for Americans who have access to safe tap water. If you live in an area with an EPA-regulated water supply (which includes almost every municipal water supply), there is no reason to drink bottled water.

Privatization: Bottling water privatizes water supplies and removes this precious commodity from one area of the planet to ship it to another. Large multinational corporations are purchasing water supplies to mark up and sell to consumers. Corporations control privatized water, and people have little to no say about the costs and regulation. However, municipal water is governed and controlled by the people. *https://www.foodandwaterwatch.org/issues/clean-water/*

Fossil Fuels: Bottled water requires a tremendous input of fossil fuels. Oil is used to create plastic for the bottles. Gas and diesel fuel are consumed transporting the water from the bottling plant to consumers around the world.

Plastics: Plastic bottles generally are not recycled. Eight out of every ten bottles wind up in a landfill rather than a recycle bin. Recycle bottles to minimize the use of additional oil in creating bottles. Plastic bottles take up a tremendous amount of landfill space and require centuries to break down.

Take a Pledge: Take a stand against all the negative impacts of bottled water and sign a pledge to avoid bottled water. Organize families, churches, and municipalities to avoid bottled water. Encourage workplaces to remove bottled water from vending machines. Together we can help preserve creation by eliminating the wasteful and unnecessary consumption of bottled water.

Recovery Waters

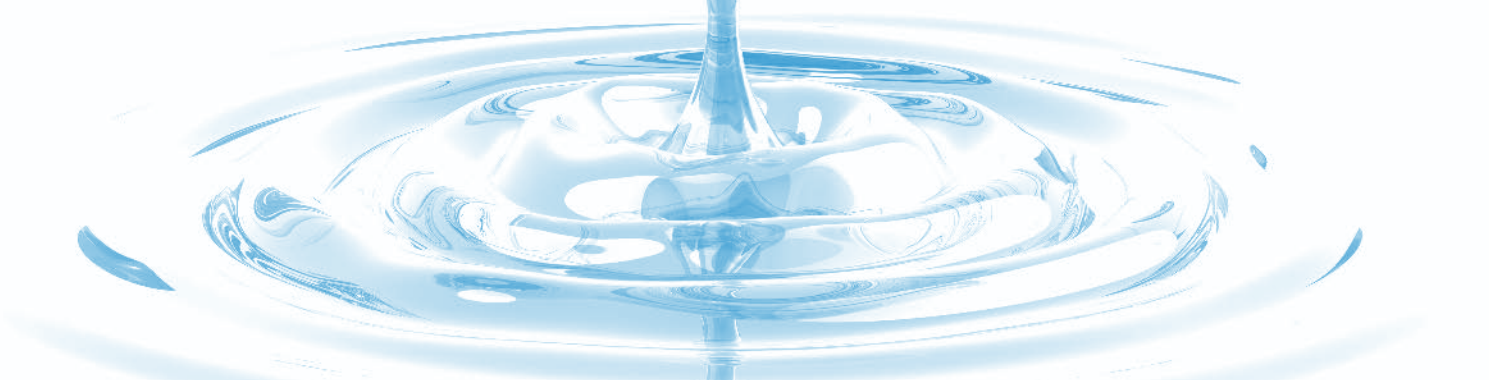
In Genesis 6–8 we read that God destroyed the world and nearly all life with catastrophic flooding. However, in this story God also preserved life by instructing Noah to save two of every creature. After the disaster God sought to renew the earth and restore life. God is present in the restoration of the world after disasters, and we too are called to share in restoration efforts. In Christ's earthly ministry the call to aid those in need is often repeated. Christians are called to care for those impacted by catastrophic events and to care for the world in a way that helps prevent further disasters.

Immediate Needs: Often fresh water supplies can be tainted after a disaster strikes. In these instances bottled water may be the only source of potable water available. It can be wise to keep a supply of bottled water in case emergencies require its use to meet immediate needs. Before attempting to purify your own water, heed the instructions of local authorities regarding the appropriate techniques, if any, for your particular situation.

Food: People who have been displaced by natural disasters often need food and water. Where possible, provide hot meals, nutrient-rich foods, and fruits with a high moisture content, such as melons, citrus, and grapes.

Shelter: Flooding and other disasters often displace individuals and sometimes entire communities. Create shelter for others by converting unused rooms and open areas into temporary living spaces. Before a hurricane or flood season arrives, work with local churches and middle governing bodies to develop disaster assistance plans.

One Great Hour of Sharing: Since 1949, Presbyterians have joined with millions of other Christians through One Great Hour of Sharing to share God's love with people experiencing need. Your generous gifts support the ministries of the Presbyterian Hunger Program, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, and Self-Development of People. These ministries address unique aspects of water concerns domestically and internationally by providing assistance in disaster situations as well as through long-term development. *www.pcusa.org/oghs*



Resources for Further Study

We hope the information in this guide will assist you as you seek to practice water stewardship and help ensure that the abundant waters of life that God intends for all are available. However, there are many other resources that can assist us as we strive to live responsibly in the world. As our world is ever changing, it is important to utilize a variety of resources to inform our understanding of God's world. Below is a brief list of some resources that provide excellent information for further study and reflection.

- **Just Living:** Access companion materials to Sustaining Waters. Join the Enough for Everyone network and explore how individuals, couples and families can practice faith in daily life. *www.pcusa.org/justliving*

- **Explore the Eco-Journey Blog:** This blog from the Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP) offers environmental and sustainable living education, advocacy, and action opportunities. *https://pcusa.org/news-storytelling/blogs/eco-journey*

- **PC(USA) Policy:** Denominational policies that guide and shape the ministry of the PC(USA) can be found online. *https://pcusa.org/acswp-policy*

- **Presbyterian Hunger Program:** One of the three ministries supported by the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering, PHP works to alleviate hunger and eliminate its causes, engaging in ministries across the United States and throughout the world. *www.pcusa.org/hunger*

- **Self-Development of People:** One of the three ministries supported by the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering, SDOP participates in the empowerment of economically poor, oppressed, and disadvantaged people who are seeking to change the structures that perpetuate poverty, oppression and injustice. *www.pcusa.org/sdop*

- **Presbyterian Disaster Assistance:** One of the three ministries supported by the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering, PDA enables congregations and mission partners to witness to the healing love of Christ through caring for communities adversely affected by crisis and catastrophic events. *www.pcusa.org/pda*

- **Creation Justice Ministries:** A wealth of resources for Christians addressing a wide range of topics related to environmental justice. *www.creationjustice.org*

Enough for Everyone

Our scripture and tradition call us to care for the natural world so that all may live abundantly. God cares deeply for all of creation and seeks to preserve the diversity of life. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seeks to live in accord with the call to economic and environmental justice, and the Presbyterian Hunger Program aims to assist individuals in living a just life that honors God.

At the heart of the Presbyterian Hunger Program is a deep concern for global economic justice and a commitment to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with integrity. We are called by God in Christ to bring good news and to proclaim release to those held captive by human structures and injustices. Living as global disciples means evaluating our lifestyle choices. Adopting changes for individual and congregational lifestyle integrity witnesses to our faith and God's creation.

Just Living is produced by the Presbyterian Hunger Program. Your financial support enables PHP to witness to the healing love of Christ and to bring hope to communities and individuals struggling with hunger. Give online at *https://pcusa.org/donate/h999999-hunger-general*. Or mail your check, made out to PC(USA) with "H999999 Hunger" on the memo line, to PC(USA), Box 643700, Pittsburgh PA 15264- 3700. Thank you!

Download this resource. *www.pcusa.org/justliving*

Presbyterian Hunger Program
100 Witherspoon Street
Louisville KY 40202
800-728-7228 x5626
enough@pcusa.org
www.pcusa.org/hunger

Revised June 2025