

pērs·pec'tives

A Seasonal Newsletter of the
United Methodist Office for the United Nations

WATER: A HUMAN RIGHT FOR ALL

BY ESMERALDA V. BROWN

"Access to freshwater supplies is becoming an urgent matter across the planet. The survival of 1.2 billion people is currently in jeopardy due to lack of adequate water and sanitation. Unequal access to water causes conflicts between and among people, communities, regions and nations.

"Biodiversity is also threatened by the depletion and pollution of fresh water resources or through impacts of large dams, large scale mining and hot cultures (irrigation) whose construction often involves the forced displacement of people and disruption of the ecosystem.

"The integrity and balance of the ecosystem is crucial for the access to water. Forests build an indispensable part in the ecosystem of water and must be protected. The crisis is aggravated by climate change and further deepened by strong economic interests. Water is increasingly treated as a commercial good, subject to market conditions" (Statement on Water for Life, 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Porto Alegre, Brazil, February 14-23, 2006.)

A series of international conferences all have affirmed the importance of water as a human right, even as they acknowledged the crisis that is looming large in the use and abuse of water, especially potable drinking water.

At the United Nations Millennium Summit held in 2000, governments committed to Millennium Development Goals that include environmental sustainability. This goal committed to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water. It aimed to achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by reducing in half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by the year 2020.

In 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, the United Nations stated that "over one billion peoples in developing countries do not have access to safe drinking water and 2.5 billion lack adequate sanitation facilities."

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted in 1948 by the United Nations) forms the basis for declaring water as a human right. It says: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." This human rights claim strongly that water is a human right for the poor, even as it is for all.

Many human rights organizations, women, con-

cerned groups and churches around the world have affirmed that access to drinkable water should be a right of all human beings. They agree that water, as a moral obligation by society, should only be distributed at cost. It would be a crime, they say, to deny water to people who cannot pay.

Women's access to water is restricted due to distance, time constraints or economic factors, they are often obliged to accept lower-quality water, says the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). This international body on women states that this is a particularly frightening alternative given that 80 percent of all illnesses are transmitted by contaminated water. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Committee has underscored that the health of rural women often crucially depends on adequate and non-discriminatory access to water. This quote says it all:

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Children have the right to a clean and safe drinking water. (Photo by Liberato Bautista of an indigenous girl in Brazil)

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ISSUE FOCUS

WATER: A Human Right For All

United Methodist
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USA

REMEMBER YOUR BAPTISM

BY GARY GIRAO

The Bible begins and ends with water. The first page of Genesis was so soaked with water that God had to wring it out into a dry patch of land where life, land life can thrive. So far, a lot of that liquid water is still here on earth. Much of it however has been in cold storage, where somebody must have played with the thermostat, melting the ice, drenching, making us slip. Water gives life. And takes life. For every O₂ we consume, water requires half of it to create H₂O, and then gives it right back through plants and trees. We can choke the life out of water but in so doing we choke

4:1-2, NIV). A trustee receives a gift, not just money, business, but all kinds of gifts. A trustee is primarily a receiver, a receiver who is accountable, tasked to go beyond parochial interests.

Oikonomos, the Greek word we translate as steward can also be translated as trustee. The United Methodist Book of Resolutions (2004) calls us trustees of creation. We are then trustees of water. God trusts us with a gift. To be held accountable. It is in this spirit that the trustees of Enron may go to jail for messing up the trust of their employees. We can certainly hold major mul-

We can choke the life out of water
but in so doing we choke ourselves.
We are in relationship with water
WHETHER WE LIKE IT OR NOT.

ourselves. We are in relationship with water whether we like it or not. So what do we make of the water-soaked, first page of Genesis?

It tells us that water was given to us. We receive it. We did not make water. We did not culture it in a Petri dish. We did not invent it. We store it. We make it more colorful. We harvest it, turn it into blue gold, sparkling, but it is still something we receive. The first page of Genesis tells us that we are primarily receivers, not givers. We used to call ourselves managers of water. But somehow the word "manager" conjures up images of business, making water as a commodity. There is nothing wrong in that per se. But water is more than business, it is life. It is no wonder then that Jesus' favorite metaphor of himself is water: river, stream, a well, living water, the giver of life.

We are stewards of water. But that word has somehow been lost in our generation. Somehow it has only found itself in cruise ships, airplanes, and five star restaurants that feature stewards that show you an array of red and white wines. The book of Galatians tells us thus: "What I am saying is that as long as the heir is a child, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. He is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father" (Gal

tinational water corporations accountable to the common good. As trustees of water we can also hold them accountable to their own internal code of ethics. Private water companies in the United States are for the most part accountable to public municipal regulators. A trustee is not just accountable. A trustee also looks at the gift, a painting, an endowment, receives it, enjoys it. As Christian trustees, we respond in worship when we behold a gift of God.

The Bible begins and ends with water. In between pages, we see some of the driest desolation that only a woman like Hagar was forced to traverse. There is also the widow and her child who were collecting the last pieces of twigs and branches in order to cook their last meal together, to die together, parched, with no water. We do not want those pages to be dry, brittle. We respond in repentance. Our baptism reminds us that we are water-soaked, water-immersed followers of Jesus. And so we groan with the whole of creation, for Shalom, when everything, humans and creations alike live in harmonious relationship, right there, in the last page of Revelation, water-soaked.

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pers·pec'tives

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LITANY

BY GARY GIRAO

- ONE:** Often I go through life with a god-complex. I relish in giving but have a hard time receiving.
ALL: We forget that God is the giver and we are the receivers.
ONE: Jesus says that I abandon myself so that I can receive many times over (Luke 19:28-30).
ALL: For God is the giver and we are the receivers.
ONE: Jesus says that freely I have received and freely I give.
ALL: For God is the giver first and we the receivers.
ONE: Jesus desires me to receive life in abundance (John 10:10).
ALL: For God has given abundantly and only then can we receive abundantly.
ONE: Jesus says to give as you have received (Matt 10:8).
ALL: And for this today we can truly give back in worship, with the most expansive of hearts, for Jesus who has loved us first, who gave us all.

SERMON

Text: Matthew 25:31-46

³⁷Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?' ³⁸And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?' ³⁹And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' ⁴⁰And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Jesus seemed to have responded in two different ways to the question of attaining eternal life. There was Nicodemus in John 3 where Jesus responded that "whoever believes in him (Jesus) may have eternal life" (John 3:15, NRSV). There was also the rich young ruler who was told to "go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, then come follow me" (Mark 10:21, NRSV). The text in Matthew 25 seems to resonate with the latter response of Jesus. The context is judgment day and the righteous are placed on the king's right hand side because "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink" and so on and so forth (Matt 25:35).

Are Jesus' two responses merely reflecting the sum of the commandments? The two sides of the same coin? The spokes of a wheel radiating from the same center? In the sixth century, Abba Dorotheus proposed that as we draw nearer to God, we at the same time draw nearer to each other. And when we draw farther away from God, we also become further alienated from

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What must I then give up?

our neighbor. Or perhaps, can the two responses be distilled into the words: Come follow me? Come love me? Or come have a relationship with me? Make me number one in your life.

When I read the Matthew text, I hear loud and clear the command to give this and to give that. When I hear Jesus' words to "Follow me," my next question becomes: What must I then give up? I become cranky again just like the rich young ruler. I too often forget that the words of Jesus to "Follow me" are an invitation to live, for me to receive life. Why is that I instinctively hear Jesus' "thou shall not" rather than his offer of "yes" to life? Why did Peter so vehemently refused the Lord's offer to wash his dirty feet? And why was it easy for the Samaritan woman to say "yes," "absolutely!"

The first question to Jesus' "Follow me" should be: "What do I receive?" The second question becomes: "What can I do with the life that I have received?" The list that the text in Matthew gives us is of course not exhaustive. I think we are called to "incarnate" the list in whatever situation we might find ourselves in. Nonetheless, I am drawn to this simple and basic list. It is after all a list embedded in the flurry of judgment day, of sheeps and goats. The rich young ruler might have been interested in this list, for starters.

When I go through the list I have dis-

covered that "giving water" becomes more challenging than say giving canned food, visiting somebody in jail, getting the room number from a hospital operator or cleaning out my closet for Salvation Army. Yet, water is pretty basic. Even with the basic mission of the church it is needed: Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them... Even John Wesley had to labor through it when he sent his ministers to the Americas. Even the disciples had to scramble for water when Jesus started girding his loin with towel. And yet when we start washing feet in our churches it is the awkwardness of taking our socks off that gets us, not the water. Perhaps because we have so much of it.

RITUAL OF WATER

[This ritual is designed to come after the sermon. The congregation goes through these stations in chronological order. Songs like "I Surrender All," "As the Deer" or "Who am I?" can be sung during the ritual. Tell the congregation to remember Peter when they respond at the first station with the words: "No, the Lord shall never wash my feet."]

Foot washing basin of water - Assign somebody to represent Jesus, "Can I wash your feet with water?"... Member responds "No, the Lord shall never wash my feet."

Altar rail - allow a moment of meditation and prayer. Depending on your congregation the minister might say, "Remember your baptism" or "Remember the living water"

Samaritan woman's bucket - "Remember the water that I got back then." [Dip hands and wet face.]

WATER... | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

*"All the taps are dry,
the only ones running are my eyes -*

*When I cry because the teacher scolds me
for coming to school dirty...*

My sister also cries

When I go to the school line

And she goes to the water line...

*My mother also cries,
yes my mother too,
she cries*

*When father shouts
because he has no water to bathe...*

*Or because she does not smell nice
when he comes to bed..."*

(This quote is by a young 11 year old boy from a Swahili recitation in Nairobi's Mathare Valley slum on World Water Day 1996. It illustrates some of the hidden costs that women have to pay everyday for not having easy access to water.)

A report presented at the 4th World Water Forum held in Mexico from March 16-22, 2006 concluded that taking women into account in water related projects would help to eradicate poverty and the participation of women in developing the plans would multiply the benefits to the community. According to the Geneva-based NGO, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), "when women are taken into account, school attendance increases, and the drop-out rate falls among young women and girls. (For Her It's the Big Issue: Putting Women at the Centre of Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene - Evidence Report.)

Other examples and experiences across

the world also seem to reinforce this view. Studies from Asia, Africa and Latin America show that when women participated in decision making on water and sanitation concerns their life expectancy and that of their families increased, the maternal death rate decreased, and the general health and nutritional status of the community improved." (See www.wsscc.org.)

The organisations, *Water for All Campaign* and *Food and Water Watch*, in a Joint Declaration of Movements in Defense of Water, they stated: "**We Reject:**

- Any financing from International Financial Institutions that is conditional on the liberalization and privatization of water services.
- National and regional legislation that invites the process of privatization and commercialization of water.
- The predatory and unsustainable model of water management based on mega projects, dams, port construction, mining exploitation and bottling water."

Holding a different perspective on the issue is the World Water Council (WWC), an international think tank created in 1997 to promote privatization of water with the cooperation of the World Bank. The Council holds conferences that include the participation of water contractors, government ministries, academic centers, United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The advocates of privatization reject the notion of water as a human right and instead point out that given the scarcity of water it should be considered an economic good available to the highest bidder and not subject to waste.

According to Maude Barlow, the National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians and co-founder of the Blue Planet

Project, "The World Water Council (WWC) and the World Bank now admit that they have made serious mistakes in the past and are calling for more accountable and transparent public private water partnerships with guidelines established in concert with civil society. They also realize that they have lost the battle as to whether water is a human right and are now seeking language for a UN Convention that would not exclude private companies."

Ms. Barlow further states that, "The big water companies are now saying that if banks and the host governments will not guarantee them a secure profit, in spite of currency fluctuations and political opposition, they will leave. The World Water Council is working to ensure the security of their profits in the light of these new developments."

There is unanimous consensus that there is a water crisis. There are powerful economic interests that seek to make a profit from the scarcity of drinkable water. But there is a growing constituency of peoples around the world that feel that profits should be secondary to the enforcement of the concept of water as a human right. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in an article "Why Water?," asserted that "No issue has ever been more neglected. And it is neglected because it is of concern mainly to the poor and the powerless." (See www.waterforpeople.org.)

In its Social Principles, the United Methodist Church affirms that "All creation is the Lord's, and we are responsible for the ways in which we use and abuse it. Water, air, soil, minerals...are to be valued and conserved because they are God's creation and not solely because they are useful to human beings...We urge development of international agreements concerning equitable utilization of the world's resources [like water] for human benefit so long as the integrity of the earth is maintained."



There are powerful economic interests that seek to make a profit from the scarcity of drinkable water. But there is a growing constituency of peoples around the world that feel that profits should be secondary to the enforcement of the concept of water as a human right.

JUSTICE LIKENED TO WATER, PROCLAIMED THE PROPHET AMOS

BY LIBERATO C. BAUTISTA

Justice is like water. And water illustrates qualities of justice. How so?

The theme of the 2004 General Conference was "Water-Washed, Spirit-Born." It is a theme replete with many sub-themes, like justice, which was not given prominence in pre-General Conference materials. For this issue of pers.pec'tives, let's look at the justice nexus between "water-washed" and "spirit-born."

Water-washed reminds me how constantly fascinated and challenged I am by the prophet Amos's likening of justice to water - "Let justice roll down like water, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." The challenge lies in the fact that

we Christians are baptized in water. To be water-washed and spirit born is to be baptized into ministries of justice.

Water-washed reminds me of the one major physical attribute of water - that it seeks its own level. In the triad of Micah's call - "do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God" - we are challenged to be spirit-born so that while we are baptized into ministries of justice we are also washed by water seeking its own level, which is being washed so that we are cleansed and humbled before God in service to neighbors and one another.

Water-washed reminds me of another characteristic of water - its purity. Water is

the safest and healthiest drink sans comparison. The challenge lies in serving with purest intention both God and neighbor. United Methodists can do this through the same ministries which John Wesley has called every Methodist to do - ministries that join works of mercy and kindness (which are the ministries that immediately alleviate human pain and suffering) and works of justice (which are the ministries that advocate social and public policies that address the root causes of injustice and unpeace).

To be water-washed is to be baptized into ministries of justice. To be spirit-born is to be humbled before God and neighbor in doing these ministries.

NEWS AND RESOURCES ON WATER

World Water Day, March 22, was held around the world. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), coordinator for the day, stated that the 2006 theme "Water and Culture" was to draw attention to the many ways of viewing, using, and celebrating water as there are cultures across the world. Sacred, water is at the heart of many religions and is used in different rites and ceremonies. Fascinating and ephemeral, water has been represented in art for centuries - in music, paintings, writing, and cinema. It is an essential element in many scientific endeavors. Each region of the world has a different way of holding water sacred, but each recognizes its value and its central place in human lives. Cultural traditions and indigenous practices, and societal values determine how people perceive and manage water in the world's different regions. (Source: www.unesco.org/water/.)

The 4th World Water Forum was held in Mexico from March 16-22, 2006. The Water Forum is becoming an important international event. It is built on the knowledge, experience and input from different organizations active in developing global water policy. The Forum was attended by thousands of representatives of governments, NGOs, Indigenous organizations, industry, academia and civil society.

A report presented during the Forum

concluded that taking women into account in water related projects would help to eradicate poverty and the participation of women in developing the plans would multiply the benefits to the community. According to the Geneva-based NGO, Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), "when women are taken into account, school attendance increases, and the drop-out rate falls among young women and girls." (Source: WSSCC: www.wsscc.org; "For Her It's the Big Issue: Putting Women at the Centre of Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene" - Evidence Report).

Other examples and experiences across the world also seem to reinforce this view. Studies from Asia, Africa and Latin America show that when women participated in decision making on water and sanitation concerns their life expectancy and that of their families increased, the maternal death rate decreased, and the general health and nutritional status of the community improved.

Resources:

4th World Water Forum:
www.worldwaterforum.org

Summary on the 4th World Water Forum:
The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)
www.iisd.ca/ymb/worldwater4/

World Water Council:
www.worldwatercouncil.org

World Council of Churches:
www.wcc-coe.org

Church World Service:
www.churchworldservice.org

World Health Organization
www.who.int/en/

UN Millennium Development Goals
www.un.org/millenniumgoals/index.asp

Global Water Partnership
www.gwpforum.org/serviet/PSP

The World's Water
www.worldwater.org/

Agricultural Missions
www.agriculturalmissions.org/index.html

Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)
www.wedo.org

Video - "Reclaiming Water"
Women's Division, General Board of Global Ministries co-funded by Church World Service.
www.sparklehouse.com/angela/WaterEverywhere.html

PROTECTION OF WATER

BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, 2004
(NASHVILLE, TN: THE UNITED METHODIST PUBLISHING HOUSE)

In the Bible, water, in both its physical and spiritual dimensions, is a gift. God covenants with God's people and extends invitations to them to experience fullness of life. A measure of this abundant life is God's offer of water as a free gift without cost or price (Is. 55:1). Both water as an element and water of life as a healing agent (Rev. 22:17) are a gift of God to everyone who thirsts. Further, the Bible offers examples of God and humans intervening in people's water crises, and providing water (Gen. 21:19; Gen. 24:15-21; Num. 20:9-11). Water is an integral part of God's radical expression of God's love to all humanity. Water cannot be monopolized or privatized. It is to be shared like air, light, and earth. It is God's elemental provision for survival for all God's children together on this planet.

The problem is:

- Water use is increasing everywhere. The world's six billion inhabitants appropriate 54 percent of all accessible water.
- Globally, 69 percent of all water used on a yearly basis is used by agriculture; industry accounts for 23 percent, and domestic households account for 8 percent.
- Excess withdrawals, withdrawal at a rate greater than can be charged naturally is occurring in parts of the Arabian Peninsula, China, India, Mexico, the former Soviet Union, and the United States.
- One toilet flush uses as much water as an average person in a developing country uses in a whole day, to drink, cook, wash, and clean.
- Many of the 840 million people in the world who go hungry live in water scarce regions.
- 2.3 billion people suffer from diseases linked to dirty water.
- Around the world there is a cumulative pollution of aquifers and water sources by agriculture, industry, and mining waste.
- "If water usage continues in its present form the results will be devastating to the earth and its inhabitants. Each generation must ensure that the abundance and quality of water is not diminished as a result of its activities . . . water must be protected at any cost" (*Maude Barlow: Blue Gold: The Global Water Crisis and the Commodification of the World's Water Supply*).

Therefore be it resolved that the people called United Methodists

- shall affirm and educate that water is a basic human right to be shared and enjoyed by all God's people;
- shall encourage and develop strategies for guiding principles protecting our water supply;
- shall support the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development's commitment to reduce by half the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water by 2015;
- shall affirm and teach methods to support the International Year of Freshwater commitment to protect and respect our water resources as individuals, communities, countries, and global family of concerned citizens;
- shall encourage and commit to good water management by all entities, corporations and communities;
- shall push companies that pollute to provide funds and services to clean waters that they pollute; and
- shall urge that all countries take responsibility for the way they use water.

Other resolutions:

Book of Resolutions, 1996, page 90, "Reduction of Water Usage"

Book of Resolutions, 1996, page 78, "Environmental Stewardship": Water

Resolution #10, "Environmental Stewardship": Right to Abundant and Clean Water

Resolution #7, "Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future": Water

ADOPTED 2004

See *Social Principles*, ¶ 160A.

Action Alert

"WATER IS LIFE"¹

(Action Alert by United Methodist Women's Action Network, Women's Division--General Board of Global Ministries, 100 Maryland Avenue, NE Suite 530, Washington, D.C. 20002. Tel: 202.488.5660, Fax: 202.488.5681.)

"...water connects and regulates planet earth as the sacred mat of life by nourishing the land and all living organisms including human beings."

- Indigenous Environmental Network²

In the 21st century, because of its scarcity, WATER is increasingly viewed as a commodity. The potential scarcity of water, has caused some to proclaim that access to drinkable water is the right of all human beings, and should be provided at cost as an obligation to society. Others reject the notion of a moral right to water; they point out that given the scarcity of water, it should be available as an economic good available to the highest bidder.

Since the 15th century the demand for scarce commodities has led to violent invasions and created inequities. While 70-75% of the earth is comprised of water, only a small portion is freshwater located in rivers, lakes and the ground. Two million cubic miles of water is found in the earth within a one-half mile surface of earth; seven million cubic miles of water can be found in glaciers and ice caps; and only 60,000 cubic miles of water is in the lakes, rivers and seas. Author Lester R. Brown writes that "70% of the world's water use is for irrigation, 20% is used by industry and 10% for residential purposes. As urban water use rises...farmers are faced with a shrinking share of a shrinking water supply."³ The supply of water is "falling in countries that are home to more than half of the world's people, including China, India and the US-the largest grain producers."⁴ "But only China-with nearly 1.3 billion people and an \$80 billion annual trade surplus with the United States-has the near term potential to disrupt world grain markets. In short, falling water tables [surface underground at which water is at atmospheric pressure...below the water table water is free to move under the influence of gravity⁵] in China could soon mean rising food prices for the entire world."⁶

Last year more than one billion people, one out of every six people on earth, could not drink, play or bathe in fresh clean water. Over half of the world's people live without "adequate sanitation." The demand for freshwater is increasing both from industry and the expanding urban areas: both are placing additional pressures on freshwater resources. As agriculture continues to grow so does

its freshwater needs. It will be necessary to double world food production over the next 25 years using essentially the same land area and more than three billion people will face water scarcity.⁷ This reality challenges us to think about why the developed countries now use 85% of all freshwater supplies. In the developing world where most people are poor and "subsist on family agriculture," only 15% of the world's freshwater is available. How will the world decide on just water and food strategies? How will technical approaches to shifting water to make it available in dry places fit into a holistic mix with the socio-economic and political elements? The Indigenous Environmental Network has pointed out that sharing water is not solely a matter of sharing resources, but "an ethical imperative and expression of human solidarity."

According to the first Intergovernmental Treaty to promote integrated water management practices known as the Ramsar Convention, "water was the critical element for the appearance of life on Earth, and it's essential to maintaining the important goods and services that these ecosystems provide." The report further states:

Water is key to sustainable development. Water supplies of good quality are also fundamental to poverty alleviation. But water supplies are dependent on the protection and sustainable use of ecosystems that naturally capture, filter, and store and release water, such as forests, wetlands and soils, including their biodiversity. Changing biodiversity may increase poverty, increase risks to human health, and undermine livelihood security (including food and water security). Water resource management schemes should be based on this integrated approach. Only then will human livelihoods, including food through agriculture and fisheries, access to clean water and adequate sanitation, be properly ensured."

Both the 2002 United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa and the more recent United Nations Millennium Development Goals declared the need to assure the availability of drinkable water as a priority for the entire world.

The term "sustainable development"

was first used in 1987 at a meeting of the World Commission on Environment and Development. In its report, Our Common Future, the concept of sustainable development is described as: "Economic activity that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Five years later, most governments of the world sent representatives to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Thousands of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also participated in the Summit. The Summit adopted a far-reaching Program of Action referred to as Agenda 21. The Agenda created an international consensus on the meaning of sustainable development. Governments also agreed to halt and reverse the negative impact of human behavior on the physical environment. The Agenda is considered a blueprint for protecting the earth's resources, including water.

By the time of the 2002 Johannesburg Summit that reviewed progress on achieving the original goals of the Earth Summit, "the understanding of sustainable development was broadened...particularly in regard to the important linkages between poverty, the environment and the use of natural resources."⁸ For writer Andres Edwards, "the sustainability revolution offers the possibility of a much broader coalition for positive change within and among societies."⁹ Edwards proposes a movement built around the three E's: Ecology/Environment, Economy/Employment and Equity/Equality. Central to this movement he suggests is education. "Education is the catalyst for helping everyone understand the dynamic interrelationship of the three E's."¹⁰ What can you do to educate your community on the scarcity of water and its causes?

Recent events, such as the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean, were on the minds of those attending a recent meeting of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in Mauritius. In reviewing the commitments of the Earth Summit and their impacts on small islands, the relationship between local economies, jobs, health, climate change and water was no longer an abstract concept. The human toll of excess water thrust upon small island communities were as vivid as the faces we now see of women and children dying in the deserts of Niger and Darfur,

WATER IS LIFE | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

where water is absent. Speculators are busy seizing watersheds that produce drinkable water, creating monopolies to exact huge profits from selling water to areas without adequate supply. The United States government along with leaders of other world nations make major decisions which can determine whether “water is life” for all.

¹ Indigenous Environmental Network. www.ienearth.org. PO Box 485, Bemidji, MN 56619. Tel: (218) 751-4967

² Ibid.

³ Brown, Lester R. *Outgrowing the Earth: The Food Security Challenge in an Age of Falling Water Tables and Rising Temperatures*. pg. 11-12. W.W. Norton & Company. Jan. 2005.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The McGraw-Hill Concise Encyclopedia of Environmental Science & Technology. pg. 59

⁶ Brown, Lester R. *Eco-Economy: Building an Economy for the Earth*. W.W. Norton & Company. November 2001.

⁷ Discussion paper submitted by Farmers' organizations as a Major Group to the Commission on Sustainable Development at the CSD-13 Session at the United Nations April 24-30, 2004.

⁸ <http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/>

⁹ Edwards, Andres R. *The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift*. New Society Publishers. June 15, 2005

¹⁰ Ibid.

ACTION

- Work to pass resolutions on Water as a Human Right in your local community or state. Urge your Congressional representatives to support House Concurrent Resolution 120 (H.Con. Res. 120), “Water for the World.” For more information about this bill contact your Representative at the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. You may also visit <http://thomas.loc.gov/> to read a copy of the bill.
- Host a community dialogue with elected officials to examine water issues in your area.
- For further information on Sustainable Development, please contact Esmeralda V. Brown, guest contributor to this Alert, Women’s Division at the United Methodist Office for the United Nations. Telephone: (212) 682-3633 E-mail: ebrown@gbgm-umc.org
- Read *Book of Resolutions 2004 #7 Environmental Justice for a Sustainable Future*

MAKE POVERTY HISTORY, MAKE ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER A RIGHT

The target date is 2015—when the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation should have been halved. This is but one of the targets under the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that all of the world’s countries now use as their blueprint for addressing extreme poverty in the world.

Clean water, the World Bank said, contributes to better health. “Lack of clean water and basic sanitation is the main reason diseases transmitted by feces are so common in developing countries. In 1990 diarrhea led to 3 million deaths, 85 percent of them among children. Between 1990 and 2002 about 400 million people obtained access to improved water sources, gains just sufficient to keep pace with population growth. An improved water source is any form of water collection or piping used to make water regularly available. It is not the same as ‘safe water,’ but there is no practical measure of whether water supplies are safe. Connecting all households to a reliable

source of water that is reasonably protected from contamination would be an important step toward improving health and reducing the time spent collecting water.

“More people have access to safe water compared to 10 years ago. But, in 2002, 1.1 billion people still lacked access to an improved water source, 42 percent of them in Sub-Saharan Africa and 22 percent in East Asia and Pacific. Meeting the Millennium Development Goals will require providing about 1.5 billion people with access to safe water and 2 billion with access to basic sanitation facilities between 2000 and 2015.” (See <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/GMIS/home.do>).

To learn more about the MDGs and what United Methodists can do to build the moral and political will to eradicate hunger and poverty, visit http://www.umd-gbcs.org/atf/cf/{325AB72F-313E-4CC3-BB1A-EF0A52968A8D}/un_sunday-mdg_meditation.pdf. You may also order your copies of a wallet-sized card on the MDG with a call for United Methodists to “build the moral

and political will to eradicate extreme poverty.” Place orders at the GBCS Online Store at www.umd-gbcs.org (under Peace with Justice Resources).

**UNITED NATIONS SUNDAY
WILL BE ON
OCTOBER 22, 2006**

**Theme of commemoration
and the essay and visual arts
contest will be on
Combating the Global Spread
of HIV/AIDS.**

For information, contact
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Forthcoming information at
www.umd-gbcs.org/un