

A WALK FOR WATER

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OBJECTIVES //

- To learn about the issue of water commodification and related Indigenous and faith perspectives
- To stimulate ideas for action that participants can take regarding water issues in their lives and in their communities.

TIME // 2 - 2 ½ hours

GROUP SIZE // 18-40

MATERIALS //

- Flip chart paper
- Enough copies of the infographic and fact sheets listed in the Resources section for each of the groups
- Copies of 1) the Water Walkers story, 2) the Bottled Water story, 3) the Reflections on Water sheet, and 4) the Take Action sheet for every two participants
- Video projector and laptop or computer on which to view the videos (see Resources, section 3)
- Lots of sticky notes and pens
- Markers
- Coloured markers, especially blue, purple and green
- Laptops and cellphones for doing research
- Water vessels: cups, glasses, bowls
- Blue cloth, paper or beads to represent water

PREPARATION //

- Set-up a laptop and projector for the two short videos.
- Create six "stations" around the room, or less if there are fewer participants.
 - » Each station will have a large piece of flipchart taped to the wall as well as sticky notes, pens and markers.
 - » Label half of the stations "Water Walkers/Indigenous Water" and the other half "Bottled Water" accompanied with 3-7 copies of the corresponding story – depending on group size.
 - » If you wish, you can post the infographic and copies of the factsheets near the stations (see Resources, section 2).
 - » Have items that represent water on the floor in front of the station: bowls or glasses of water; glass beads; blue cloth or paper.
- Have copies of the "Take Action" sheet available to hand out to each group for Part 3.
- Participants will eventually travel to each station as part of their own "Walk for Water"

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ACTIVITY GUIDE

PART 1: SEE //

1. Begin with a prayer about water; if you have done the Drinking Water Mindfully activity, remind participants of it.
2. Explain to participants that they will soon take a journey inspired by what they are about to learn.
3. Divide participants into groups of 3-7 people, and direct each group to one of the six stations.
4. At each station they are invited to read the material, talk about it, and write down three new things they learned on three separate sticky notes. When finished, each participant puts up their sticky notes on the flipchart paper. They are welcome to use the markers to draw relevant pictures or symbols on the flipchart. Give them about 20 minutes to complete this.
5. Next, invite them to walk to the other stations, look at and reflect on what the other groups have come up with. Allow 10-15 minutes for this.
6. When all of the groups are finished, invite them back together to watch the 8-minute video "The Story of Bottled Water" and the 2-minute video on how far bottled water travels. (See Resources, section 3.) Have them bring sticky notes and pens to write down anything new they weren't familiar with, or didn't see at any of the stations.
7. When finished, invite them to share and then add any other sticky notes/facts they'd like to their own group's flipchart.

PART 2: JUDGE //

1. When they are back at their stations, distribute the Reflections on Water handout – one for every two participants. Give them 10-15 minutes, or longer if needed, to read over the reflections and discuss in their small groups.
2. Bring the group back together.
3. Ask questions such as the following:
 - Was there anything you read or saw that surprised you?
 - What do you think about the idea of the commodification of water?
 - Do you think water should be a human right?
 - What is significant about what the Water Walkers are doing?
 - Does their journey remind you of anything in our Catholic tradition? In what way is it similar to a pilgrimage? In what way is it different?
 - What does our faith say about water? And about water as a human right?

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PART 3: ACT //

1. Invite the groups to go back to their home station and hand out a Take Action sheet for every two participants.
2. Invite them to read and discuss with each other which actions they find most interesting. They can use their cellphones and laptops to find out more about each possibility.
3. They can use the sticky notes to write out individual commitments.
4. Encourage them to choose one action they prefer as a group, and to write it on the flipchart in large letters. Give them 15-20 minutes to do these first three steps.
5. Have each group present this idea to the other groups.
6. Ask: what is the most common action between groups?
7. Ask the large group to brainstorm (or in small groups if you prefer): What steps would it take to make it happen? Have them write down the action steps and post or write these on the flipchart.
8. Discuss these plans as a group, and encourage leadership from the group to carry out these steps.

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REFLECTIONS ON WATER //

1. Indigenous Perspectives

"Anishinabe people think of rivers, especially the underground rivers, as the veins of Mother Earth carrying her lifeblood to all her children. Many of our elders are deeply concerned that her lifeblood is being polluted, contaminated and depleted willfully, thoughtlessly, and extensively by people of our times. These elders...recognize the urgency of transformation of consciousness and human behaviour toward water, the lifeblood and the birthright of every being in the web of life on Mother Earth."

Priscilla Solomon, Anishinabeque and Sister of St. Joseph, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, from *Water Lifeblood of Earth*, which she wrote for the Development and Peace Water campaign, 2002.

"We know in Creation, women are given the gift to create and sustain life. We respect our bodies when we are carrying our children by watching what we put in our bodies. Well, Mother Earth gives birth to all life and the water is her lifeblood. She needs to be respected also. The Water Walk is an opportunity for us to shift our thinking towards respect for life."

Josephine Mandamin, Anishnaabekwe, "Water Walker" and grandmother, the founder of the Mother Earth Water Walk.

2. Pope Francis: "A caress of God."

"Water is many things: a sacred element, a human right — or perhaps even more profoundly considered — a gift from God, intrinsically valuable in itself. It should also be seen by authentic believers as an entry point toward many justice concerns: wetland preservation, healthy living, opposition to destructive mining practices and extractive industries that destroy essential aquifers, respect for indigenous livelihoods and traditional knowledge, and more. Above all, I find inspiration in Francis' poetic reference to water in *Laudato Si*, describing it as 'a caress of God.' If we fully took this to heart, our actions to respect and protect water would change immediately and profoundly."

Joe Gunn, *Prairie Messenger*, June 1, 2017. Executive Director of Citizens for Public Justice, previously Social Justice Director for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

3. "You love all that exists..."

⁶ "The bible also teaches about an equitable distribution of resources, including sharing land, animals and water. This insistence on justice is often directed towards distributing the bounty of the Earth and providing for those who are marginalized ... Ecological problems are enmeshed within social structures that serve the interests of the few at the expense of the many, especially those marginalized and in poverty."

¹³ "Such a basic human right as access to water cannot be left to the whims of market forces to deliver. In our own country, Canadians should insist on government action to ban bulk exports of water, exclude water services from international trade agreements, ensure high quality standards of drinking water for all and guarantee that water utilities remain public, rather than private entities."

From: "You Love All That Exists... All Things Are Yours, God, Giver of Life." A Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative from the Social Affairs Commission, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, October 4, 2003.

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STORY: THE WATER WALKERS

Josephine Mandamin, an Anishnaabekwe “Water Walker” and grandmother, has, walked the circumference of each of the five Great Lakes: Erie, Superior, Ontario, Huron and Michigan.

She started by walking around Lake Superior in 2003, at the age of 61, with a copper pail of water in one hand and a staff in the other. The pail contains 8 litres of water. She is accompanied by other Indigenous leaders and supporters, including Grandmother Peters. Each year a growing number of people of all backgrounds join them on their annual spring walk, now known as the Mother Earth Water Walk. They walk at a brisk clip and cover 70 kilometres a day in all kinds of weather. Since completing all of the Great Lakes, the group has also walked along rivers and other lakes.

“Water is precious and sacred. It is one of the basic elements needed for all life to exist,” says Josephine Mandamin. “As women, we are carriers of the water. We carry life for the people. So when we carry that water, we are telling people that we will go any lengths for the water. We’ll probably even give our lives for the water if we have to. We may at some point have to die for the water, and we don’t want that.”

The Water Walkers call for action from each community that they pass through on their walk. “It is important for each community to think of what they can do to protect the water. Each community will come up with their own ideas of how they can keep the water clean,” said Grandmother Peters. “It is also a personal responsibility. We have to ask ourselves: How are we using the water? We should not be wasting the water. We should not be putting our garbage in there,” says Peters.

They have also started an annual Women’s Water Walk, where they raise the awareness of those living near the lakes of the importance of water to our lives, and of clean water in the lives of Indigenous peoples. The Water Walkers are currently asking Canadians to ask our governments to ensure clean water for Indigenous communities that are under boil water advisories.

“Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si* ... mentions water 47 times ... concluding that there is a human right to safe drinking water,” says Joe Gunn of Citizens’ for Public Justice, writing in *The Prairie Messenger*. “So should Christians consider water as ‘sacred,’ a ‘human right,’ or something more? More importantly, how should we act in a world where water is being ruthlessly polluted, incessantly wasted, and increasingly sold as a commodity available only to those who can afford to pay?”

Good questions. The Water Walkers are doing what they can to raise awareness of these issues. What can you do?

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STORY: BOTTLED WATER

Where do you get your water when you are at school? It may surprise you, but Canada, a land which appears to have endless water, is not immune to potential clean water scarcity.

According to the Council of Canadians, our water sources are being affected by commercial use, a growing population and by climate change that is causing an increasing number of droughts. In 2010 Statistics Canada calculated that renewable water in southern Canada declined by 8.5 per cent between 1971 and 2004.

Indigenous communities are already feeling the effects of clean water scarcity – more than 100 Indigenous communities regularly have boil water advisories and some must depend on expensive bottled water. The concern for the ongoing availability of clean water has led Anishnaabekwe elders such as Josephine Mandamin, known as the “Water Walker,” to travel the circumference of each of the five Great Lakes. “Water is precious and sacred. It is one of the basic elements needed for all life to exist,” she says.

Against a backdrop of potential clean water scarcity, reaching for a bottle of water when we’re thirsty is not a neutral act. The bottled water industry affects communities and water tables in Canada as much as it affects those in Indonesia and other parts of the Global South.

Bottled Water: just a few of many facts

- Bottled water creates plastic waste, much of which isn’t recycled. Those empty water bottles have created plastic “islands” in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, which harm ocean wildlife. They also litter pristine beaches around the world.
- Even bottles that are recycled can only be recycled a certain number of times before they leave an unrecyclable residue.
- Water bottlers remove water from local watersheds and export it to faraway places – many of which have perfectly safe, free or inexpensive, tap water.
- Water that is bottled for shipping won’t be recycled in the place it was harvested, depleting the water table.
- With every kilometre that a water bottle is shipped, its ecological footprint grows.
- It takes 5.5 litres of water to produce a 500 ml bottle – 0.5 litres in the bottle itself and another 5 litres of water that are contaminated when making the plastic bottle from oil.
- 83% of Canada’s bottled water exports come from BC, a province that experiences drought and wildfires.
- \$9 billion of Nestlé’s annual revenues come from the sale of its 52 bottled water brands.

There are many more facts about bottled water that might surprise you. To find out more, watch the animated video *The Story of Bottled Water*.

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STORY: BOTTLED WATER (continued)

Water as a commodity

Something else is happening with the bottling and sale of water – the commodification of water. What is considered a human right by the United Nations becomes a product, or commodity, that someone, or rather some company, profits from. Every litre of water that is no longer available locally to support a local community's activities – household use; farming – will eventually be replaced by purchased water.

Canadians in Aberfoyle, ON and Hope, BC have been bringing attention to this process in their communities, where the bottled water giant Nestlé has been sucking water from their aquifers and selling it in bottles across Canada. The process is threatening available future groundwater the Ontario location, where the company pays only \$3.21 for every million litres of water it bottles. Some bottled water ends up in St. John's NFLD, which has its own nearby clean water reserves.

"Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si* ... mentions water 47 times ... concluding that there is a human right to safe drinking water," says Joe Gunn of Citizens for Public Justice, writing in *The Prairie Messenger*. "So should Christians consider water as 'sacred,' a 'human right,' or something more? More importantly, how should we act in a world where water is being ruthlessly polluted, incessantly wasted, and increasingly sold as a commodity available only to those who can afford to pay?"

Good questions. What can you do?

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TAKE ACTION //

Here are some ideas. Explore them further with the help of the online resources listed at the end of this document.

1. **Stop buying bottled water.**

2. **Convince your school or municipality to become a Blue Community.**

The Council of Canadians promotes a movement called "Blue Communities" to protect water. Schools, school boards and communities of many types are invited to become a Blue Community and commit to these three actions:

- recognize water and sanitation as human rights,
- ban the sale of bottled water in their facilities and at events they sponsor, and
- promote publicly financed, owned and operated water and waste water systems.

3. **Convince school boards and schools to install new water fountains that accommodate students' own reusable water bottles.**

In Northern Ontario, students inspired by a previous Development and Peace campaign against bottled water were successful in getting some schools to do so.

4. **Take action for First Nations and Indigenous people's access to fresh water.**

The Council of Canadians has a special campaign for teachers and students that will help you do this. See the Resources section for more information.

5. **Join a Water Walk.**

The Annual Women's Water Walk is open to all people - men, women, children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Show your support by joining one, or by joining or initiating other celebrations of the sacredness of water.

What will you do?

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RESOURCES //

1. Our faith and water

"You Love All That Exists... All Things Are Yours, God, Giver of Life." A Pastoral Letter on the Christian Ecological Imperative from the Social Affairs Commission, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, October 4, 2003. <http://www.cccb.ca/site/Files/pastoralenvironment.html>

Gunn, Joe. *Journey to Justice*, Prairie Messenger, June 21, 2017.
http://www.prairiemessenger.ca/17_06_21/Gunn_17_06_21.html

This article covers concerns about Canadian water raised at the Conference of Canadian Religious' annual meeting 2017, and actions arising from the Conference.

2. Factsheets and infographic on bottled water and water issues

The Council of Canadians: <https://canadians.org/water>

If the links do not work, you can use a search engine and enter Council of Canadians and the following titles.

Factsheet: Spinning the bottle: Tackling Industry Spin on Bottled Water, 2017.

<https://canadians.org/sites/default/files/publications/bott%20water%20they%20say%20we%20say.pdf>

Factsheet: Five reasons to ban bottled water. March 4, 2014.

<https://canadians.org/sites/default/files/publications/5%20reasons%20to%20ban%20bottled%20water.pdf>

Poster. *Water 101*, an infographic on Canada's current water issues. 2015.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/councilofcanadians/20552894569/in/dateposted-public/>

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3. Videos on bottled water

Video (8 min) and background information

The Story of Bottled Water, Annie Leonard and the Story of Stuff Project, 8 minutes. YouTube. 2010.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Se12y9hSOM0>

The video uses some examples from the United States, but much is applicable to Canada. You can also find footnotes and a document called Myths vs. Reality, both for The Story of Bottled Water video, at <http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com>

Video and news report (2 min)

Paling, Emma, The Huffington Post Canada: *Nestlé Bottled Water Travels Up To 3,100 Km. Your Tap Is Metres Away*. Updated 04/15/2017.
http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/04/13/nestle-water-bottles-cana_n_15915622.html

Video and news story on how far bottled water travels from two sites in Canada: Aberfoyle, ON and Hope, BC.

4. Campaigns for water

Lui, Emma. Blog. *How students and teachers can take action for clean water in First Nations*. April 27, 2017.
<https://canadians.org/blog/how-students-and-teachers-can-take-action-clean-water-first-nations>

Blue Communities Project, Council of Canadians: search for Blue Communities on the Council of Canadians website. Try copying this URL into your browser : <https://canadians.org/bluecommunities>

Mother Earth Walk for Water

Many great resources are available on this website, including interviews with the founders of the Walk for Water such as Josephine Mandamin. <http://www.motherearthwaterwalk.com>

Gurson, Ayse. "Meet Josephine Mandamin (anishnaabekwe), the 'Water Walker.'" Indigenous Rising website, September 24, 2014. <http://indigenusrising.org/josephine-mandamin/>

Goulais, Bob. "Native Women Walk Around Great Lakes." Anishnaabe Blog, April 29, 2006.
<http://www.anishnaabe.ca/index.php/2006/04/29/native-women-walk-around-great-lakes/>