

## Water is Life – Let Us be Pro-Life!

We live in what is identified as “The Great Lakes State.” How ironic that thousands of Michigan residents lack access to safe water.

How can a mother keep herself, home or baby clean if the water is shut off because she can’t afford to pay the bill? How frightening for poor parents who know water shutoffs mean they can lose their children to foster care. Yet, this is the horrible reality for many of our sisters and brothers in Detroit. We must seek just solutions to end this ominous practice which burdens those most vulnerable, the poor.

Kim Redigan of the People’s Water Board Faith Outreach Committee, reminds us, “Jesus describes a creation in travail. Roaring waves and raging oceans are dire signs of a planet in distress. Water speaks in the cataclysmic tongues of rising sea levels, poisoned water, privatized water, weaponized water, withheld water.”

Remember the Flint disaster? Many religions there, including the Catholic parishes and schools (Diocese of Lansing) distributed water during the water poisoning which plagued its residents. Yet, Flint families continue to live with the long-term impact of their poisoned water, which affects the mental development and physical health of many children.

Back to Detroit: the threat of water shutoffs continues in Detroit. Access to water is critical for life. We cannot be ‘pro-life’ before birth but uncaring about life after children are born.

The DWSD (Detroit Water and Sewage Department) needs the support of community leaders to change this policy, or they will continue balancing the cost of water on the backs of the poorest Detroit residents.

Recently the faith leaders in the Interfaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit signed a position paper supporting income-based water fees in Detroit, as is currently done in Philadelphia. Archbishop Vigneron’s name did not appear on the document, but it did contain the signatures of one retired bishop, ten priests, one deacon ... and 45 Catholic sisters of many religious orders.

Have you heard the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit take a strong stand on this issue of making water affordable to our low-income Detroit brothers and sisters? Is the Archdiocese hearing the pain of local people?

What are we to do to help our neighbors? Maybe you can prayerfully consider one of the following:

1. Write or call the Archdiocese of Detroit: Remind them that water is Pro-Life, before and after birth. Ask them to hear the pain of their people and take a strong stand on making water affordable to everyone in Detroit (and the state).
2. Respectfully ask why the Archbishop’s signature is missing from the Interfaith Leadership Council of Metropolitan Detroit.
3. Call, write or email your state legislators: Support the idea that water must be safe, clean, accessible (therefore affordable) for everyone, therefore the state must do everything in its power to protect our Great Lakes and underground water.

Your voice matters! Living in the Great Lakes Region, let us remind the state and our country that water is essential for all humans, all life on our planet.

- Susan Masiak and Jeannie Daly





## Water is Life

Without drinking water no one can live  
 water security is the best gift anyone can give  
 Wasting our water  
 harms every son and daughter  
 because that water is life

Acidifying oceans makes species die  
 6 million more bits of plastic  
 every time 5 days go by  
 roughly 90%  
 of the big fish are absent  
 but our oceans are life

It's not nice when corporations set the price  
 water grows the world's crops  
 We must think about the water that we drink  
 before it stops

We can use it much more sustainably  
 and preserving it is clearly good for you and  
 good for me  
 no more pipelines needed  
 water protectors be heeded  
 protect the water of life  
 of life  
 of life

- Michael Nabert

## Michigan's PFAS Levels Raise Red Flags

From 1935 – 1982, DuPont's slogan, "Better things for better living through chemistry" reflected a time of optimism and excitement around new inventions and materials. DuPont's Teflon was among the first of the PFAS chemicals which are characterized by their ability to create strong bonds between carbon and fluorine which are both attracted to and repelled by water and are very useful features in all sorts of applications. Today it's estimated there are over 4,700 different types of these chemicals produced by hundreds of companies worldwide and they're found everywhere as well as in our homes and in our bodies. Genna Reed, Lead Science and Policy Analyst at the Union of Concerned Scientists says, "They're known as forever chemicals because the bonds are incredibly strong and very hard to break down. So, they're very long lasting and hard to get rid of. So, they persist in our bodies, but also in the environment."

Our own government claims some PFAS chemicals might affect growth, learning and behavior of infants and older children. They're also believed to interfere with women's reproductive systems, natural hormone levels and create increased risk for cancer, elevated cholesterol levels, and compromised immune systems. Based on a 2016 U.S. Environmental Protection Advisory limit, the State of Michigan has set levels of 70 parts per trillion as the threshold for clean-up needs around the state.

Establishing PFAS safety levels in our ground water and soil are currently up for debate in our country. Current safety levels established at 70 parts per trillion have recently flagged communities around Kalamazoo and Grand Haven where school systems have since been issued bottled drinking water. Recently the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency released new, updated guidelines which greatly reduce prior levels, defining the safety threshold to just 7 – 11 parts per trillion dependent on the exact chemical. The EPA and White House originally held back these findings for months calling it a "public relations nightmare" for the Trump administration.

Outgoing Governor Snyder's lame duck session produced legislation which limits Michigan's ability to tighten regulations on clean-up standards already set by the federal government. Although critics of that legislation state it harms Michigan's ability to protect its water supply

especially as it relates to PFAS contamination, promoters claim since the federal government has not set any limits on PFAS contamination levels, Michigan will not be hampered in pursuing more aggressive clean-up standards. The Snyder administration has also signed into law additional monies replenishing the state's water clean-up fund at \$45 million per year.

Outgoing Director Carol Isaacs of the Michigan PFAS Action Response Team, urges the legislature to promptly develop new health-protective standards stating, "We are now informed by the science; it is the duty of the state to set policy".

– Sue Buratto

Lester Graham, "PFAS: What is this stuff?", *Michigan Radio*, October 1, 2018.

Bryce Huffman, Emma Winowiecki and Stateside Staff, "State PFAS Advisory Board says clean up standard may be too high", *Stateside's* interview with PFAS panel chair Dr. David Savitz, professor of epidemiology at Brown University School of Public Health, December 19, 2018.

Keith Matheny, A. A. "Science Panel: Michigan's PFAS limit may not adequately protect health", *Detroit Free Press*, December 18, 2018.

Michigan Environmental Council, "PFAS in Michigan: What We Know and What We Need", August 2018, [environmentalcouncil.org](http://environmentalcouncil.org).

## The Nestlé Water Debate

Last year, the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality approved a controversial bid to allow Nestlé to pump Great Lakes water for resale around the world.

There were two main arguments against this ruling. First, it was argued that the waters of the Great Lakes are public trust waters. That means they are there for the use and enjoyment of the people of Michigan. Not for corporate profiteers and their multi-billion dollar foreign companies like Nestle.

The second argument is economic. If we accept the fact that water is a product and selling it to a corporation is one potential use for it, Nestlé paid a single application fee of \$5,000 and will be required to pay a \$200 annual reporting fee to extract 576,000 gallons per day of Michigan groundwater. That's about one-third of a penny per gallon (\$0.000347.) To buy Nestlé's water, you'll pay roughly \$2.67 per gallon (a 12 pack of 12-ounce Ice Mountain water bottles sells for \$2 or \$3). That's as much as 7,000 times more expensive than what Nestlé is actually paying per gallon of water.

The Nestlé company website ([www.nestle-watersna.com/en/communities/your-community/michigan/know-the-michigan-ice-mountain-facts](http://www.nestle-watersna.com/en/communities/your-community/michigan/know-the-michigan-ice-mountain-facts)) has a list of claims and counter arguments in favor of its contract with Michigan. These include:

- Claim: Nestlé Waters is draining Michigan's water.
- Counter arguments: Michigan has an abundance of water - it's number 1 in the U.S. Water is a renewable resource.
- Claim: Nestlé Waters pays next to nothing to take water from Michigan.
- Counter arguments: All industrial and commercial water users pay the same price if they own the infrastructure. Nestlé makes significant investments in Michigan infrastructure, and creates good quality jobs for Michigan residents.
- Claim: Nestlé Waters proposed increase in withdrawal is not sustainable.
- Counter arguments: Scientific data confirms that the water withdrawals do not have an adverse impact. Environmental monitoring is ongoing.

Clearly water has value, and people are willing to pay for it. There does not seem to be one clear cut answer on this issue, but we have an obligation to continue to ask questions and expect responsible behavior and policies from our businesses.

- Barb Staniszewski

## Climate Change in the Great Lakes Area

Michigan has always been known as the Great Lakes state – we are lucky to have such abundant water resources. But what will the changing climate do to our Great Lakes?

According to Popular Science, Michigan will be the best place to live in the United States in the year 2100, because it is likely to avoid the increasing threats of droughts, hurricanes, floods, and forest fires facing much of the rest of the country due to global climate change. But that same global climate change could also affect the water level in the Great Lakes, lowering the level while the ocean sea levels go up. That is because warmer winters mean less ice cover, more evaporation, and thus lower water levels.

Another threat to the Great Lakes is algae blooms, and a warmer climate is conducive to more of them. Nutrient overloading causes freshwater vegetation to grow out of control. Changing precipitation patterns, especially massive rain, wash nutrients from livestock and farms and even suburban and urban areas into the lakes, fueling algae growth.

How relationships between organisms and ecosystems are manipulated by climate change remains largely yet another mystery. The only thing we can predict is that species that do well in warmer conditions might have an advantage over species that do well in colder conditions. Scientists are beginning to explore what kinds of changes species will be experiencing as the colder months begin to grapple with warmer temperatures. But they don't yet know how all the rules of the game fit together.

"When you start messing with water temperature, it affects all the organisms from the plankton to the fish," said Steven Pothoven, a fishery biologist with National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

"It is an ecological experiment taking place," said Jeffrey Andresen, Michigan's state climatologist and a geography professor at Michigan State University. Keeping up with what is happening is one thing, but making predictions is difficult.

For more information about climate change and the Great Lakes, visit the website [greatlakesecho.org](http://greatlakesecho.org)

- Barb Staniszewski

## Water: a question of justice ?

***"And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward: (Mt. 10:42)***

The references to water in the Old and New Testaments are many, and underline the two basic functions of water as life-giving ("he would have given you living water" Jn. 4/10) and cleaning ("having our bodies washed with pure waters" Hb. 10/22).

Fortunately, most of us have never experienced lack of water: it is so much part of our daily routine that we do not pay attention to its role in our life. Unfortunately, it is not the same for some of our neighbors. The articles written for this "Voice for Justice" issue underline the fact that access to water and access to drinkable water is not always feasible for all, and that protection of water is essential to the future of the planet. Unfortunately, be it for financial reasons or political reasons (infrastructure, lack of priority and lack of respect for the environment) the "water" problem does not seem to be a priority for our



government. Yet, they are issues of life or death for our brothers and sisters.

In 1986, the US Bishops after many years of discussion published a pastoral letter called "Economic Justice for All" which underlines the fundamental tenants of Catholic Social Teaching: applying Gospel values to the daily tenants of our life.

1. Access to basic material needs such as food, water, clothing, shelter and medical need is a right for each individual and should be protected by the Community.
2. As Gospel people, we are called to provide justice for all, which means the poor have the single most urgent economic claim on the conscience of the community (nation).

Easy to read... but much more difficult to put into practice. Several possible actions such as calling representatives or government officials and our religious leaders, have been suggested in the preceding articles. If we act out of our sense of justice, these actions are not mainly political but are Gospel actions. Our sense of community, our sense of justice require us to act. Let's do it as community. We can make a difference.

- Jacques Pasquier