

Together for water

Newsletter of the WCC Ecumenical Water Network

February/March 2021

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear readers, I am happy to introduce you to the second newsletter of the WCC Ecumenical Water Network (EWN). Thank you to all of you who have given us such encouraging feedback on our first issue last month! This issue is dedicated to February -March 2021.

As the WCC-EWN's Seven Weeks for Water Lenten Campaign is currently going on, we talked to WCC-EWN members about the significance of such spiritual reflection and about what water means to them, in line with the theme of this year's World Water Day (March 22). We also interviewed one of the contributors, Michele Roberts from the Environmental Justice Health Alliance (EJHA), about how drinking water violations in the US disproportionately affect people of colour and the poor.

From the National Council of the Churches in the USA (NCCUSA) we received a strong statement from its president and general secretary Jim Winkler, condemning water cut-offs in the USA. As you discover these and more stories, please remember: this newsletter is not simply about us sharing stories and news about what the WCC-EWN is up to. We want to hear from you and help spread inspiring examples from all over the world of churches and people of faith working towards for water for all.

Dinesh Suna, Coordinator WCC-EWN

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2021 Seven Weeks for Water launched..... 4
- FBOs have high hopes for World Water Report 4
- Eco School 2020-2021 4
- Ecotheology conference: Ecological Relationships in the Anthropocene era 5
- “Water on Wall Street” - unpacked 5
- North America: Watered Down Justice 6
- North America: Water cut-offs a sin and stupidity, says NCCUSA 6
- Switzerland: More church organizations join Blue Community movement 6
- Switzerland: Plebiscites related to water..... 7
- India: World Water Day competition by Church of South India 7
- 22 March: Webinar with UN Special Rapporteur..... 8
- Photo of the month 9
- A moment for water..... 10
- Guatemala: Granadillas, source of water and life . 11
- Emmy-Awarded Documentary “I Stand: Guardians of the Water” 11
- Brazil: Águas para Vida – Waters for Life..... 12
- Advocating for universal WASH services 12



Photo: Ivars Kupcis/WCC

Reflections on water

Without water, there is no life. It's as simple as that. Does it need more than that for us to be concerned - and act - when water is wasted, polluted, when it is owned and controlled by the highest bidder? Find out more about why, every year, WCC-EWN invites you to use the season of Lent to reflect on God's gift of water. We talked to WCC-EWN members about what water and what spiritual reflection about it means to them, in line with the theme of this year's World Water Day.

FEATURE

Reflections on water

Year after year, people of faith, theologians, philosophers, environmentalists, and people from church-related grassroots organizations, as part of the WCC-EWN's Seven Weeks for Water Lenten campaign, try to capture what is happening in their region regarding water. The editors talked to different members of the WCC-EWN about what the Seven Weeks for Water mean to them and why spiritual reflection is important as we strive for the responsible management and equitable distribution of water for all.

“Some contributors to the Seven Weeks denounce the crimes that are being committed against Earth and people through water. Others share a hopeful account of what the church, what people of faith, can do with respect to water for all,” says Veronica Flachier, Lutheran pastor and representative of WCC-EWN from Ecuador. “It is always a prophetic call, it is to raise the prophetic voice of the church to remind all of us that water is a good that we cannot do without,” she adds on what the campaign means to her. “It is a voice of warning and of hope that rises to tell us that we have to take action, that our faith must be active.”

No matter the region, contributions to the Seven Weeks for Water give testimony to the urgency of addressing the ongoing water crisis. “We see the dramatic waste of water from water bottling, fracking, and industrial farming, industrial and agricultural water pollution, and water shutoffs to the poor,” reports Susan Smith from the USA who helped prepare this year's reflections focusing on North America. “Many people believe this is the price we have to pay for economic development.”

She welcomes that the Seven Weeks for Water regularly challenge this belief that exploiting the world's water and other natural resources is necessary for economic prosperity. “In reality, we are trading our health and the protection of all Creation to allow the few to make short-term profits,” stresses Smith. Facts and stories from all over the world shared as

part of the campaign show that often it is the poorest who are most affected whenever water is polluted, overexploited and unequally distributed.

Smith explains why her faith calls her to speak up and act in the face of water injustice: “Jesus' radical message was that we should reject a status quo that favours the rich over the poor and the powerful empire over ordinary people,” she says. To her, theological reflection is key in providing guidance. “We need deep reflection to know what action to take, and faith that change is possible.”

Elias Wolff, a Roman Catholic priest and theologian from Brazil, emphasizes that water as a life-giving element right at the intersection of environmental and social justice has been a key theme of the WCC-EWN's work and its Lenten campaign from the beginning. “We are called to listen to the cry of the earth and the cry of poor, as Pope Francis put it in his encyclical *Laudato si'*,” he explains. “A true ecological conversion, an ‘integral conversion’ includes a new way of being and living with people and all of creation.

“Achieving such an integral ecology calls for a profound interior conversion on both the personal and communal level,” says Wolff, underlining the importance of spiritual reflection. “Lent is a good time to reflect and to develop a spirituality that can sustain and nourish our capacity to live in a more sustainable and integrated way with all of creation,” he finds. Wolff stresses that in the end this is about much more than water. “It's about reconstructing the relationships between human beings and with nature so that no one is hungry and thirsty for justice.”

Theological and biblical reflection is exactly what has been at the core of the Seven Weeks for Water ever since the first WCC-EWN Lenten campaign in 2008. “I am sometimes surprised that our contributors still uncover new theological and biblical aspects and new perspectives on why and how we should engage on water issues as followers of Christ,” shares Dinesh Suna, coordinator of the WCC-EWN. “I hope that the campaign continues to be a source of inspiration and hope for people around the world in the years to come.”



This article is also available online here:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/reflections-on-water>

Photo: Sean Hawkey/WCC

GLOBAL UPDATES



*Bathanii Wilson of Navajo Nations in action, providing clean water to his community.
Photo: Bathanii Wilson*

2021 Seven Weeks for Water launched

Seven Weeks for Water has been launched online on 17 February, with reflections that help us see the water crisis as “not just an environmental crisis but also a spiritual one,” in the words of the Navajo. The Lenten campaign, focusing on water justice in North America for 2021, is developed yearly by the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Water Network (WCC EWN) since 2008.

Learn more about [Seven Weeks for Water 2021](#)

FBOs have high hopes for World Water Report

The new World Water Report 2021 will be released on World Water Day on 22 March about “Valuing Water”. WCC-EWN and other faith-based organizations (FBOs) hope that the report will also reflect the spiritual and ethical values of water. They have contributed inputs to a survey that informed the report.

Keep an eye on the following link which also contains all previous year’s reports since 2003: <https://en.unesco.org/themes/water-security/wwap/wwdr/series>

Eco School 2020-2021

Hosted by the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), the fourth edition of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Eco-School on Water, Food and Climate Justice was held 22 -27 February in the Pacific region. For the first time it was held in a hybrid format: a mix of online and onsite training. Taking place in five countries simultaneously (Fiji, Tonga, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Solomon Islands) it involved 50 young people.

Read more here <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/young-eco-advocates-recognize-deep-spiritual-connection-with-creation>



Photo: Ivar Kupcis, WCC

Ecotheology conference: Ecological Relationships in the Anthropocene era

An online conference jointly convened by the Ecumenical and Francophone Seminar on the Theology of Ecology (SOFTE) and the WCC recently addressed questions such as: How are ecological relationships shaping Christian theological thinking and vice versa in current times? And as human ascendancy over nature poses threats to the future of our planet, what are the implications for Christian theological reflection and action?

As one of the speakers, Dinesh Suna, coordinator of the WCC-EWN, addressed the spiritual and ethical values of water. “Water-related companies are valued at trillions of dollars at the markets and some consider water as the new ‘blue gold’. Yet we must remember that water is not simply a commodity like others. Water makes our planet unique, it is the difference between life and death,” Suna stressed. “We as faith based organisations have a special responsibility to ensure that everyone may enjoy the human right to water so that all can experience the fullness of life, as promised by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The papers will be made available as a publication in near future.

[Click here to learn more about this event.](#)

“Water on Wall Street” - unpacked

Last year in December, for the first time in history, water was listed as a tradable commodity at the Wall Street. Prof. Pedro Arrojo-Agudo, the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights to Water and Sanitation expressed concerns about the creation of the world’s first futures market in water, saying it could invite speculation from financiers.

Prof. Susan Smith, WCC-EWN representative from the North America region, unpacks in her new blog post what the creation of the future market for water means. She says, “the creation of a futures market for water is the ultimate act of commodifying water in California. It is dangerous, inequitable, and quite contrary to the rule in water law that prohibits financial speculation in water.”

[Read more on the WCC blog.](#)



*Elisha Sendama drinking from a pump in the village Ikonda, Tanzania.
Photo: Håvard Bjelland/ACT Alliance*

Please contribute!

Is your church or community planning an activity on or ahead of World Water Day? We’d love to know about it! Do you have any other water-related news, updates, a prayer, or photos that you would like to share with the WCC-EWN? Please contact us at water@wcc-coe.org

REGIONAL UPDATES



Michele Roberts, co-director of the Environmental Justice and Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform.
Photo: Amy Roe

North America: Watered Down Justice

Drinking water violations in the US are closely related to race and income, tells us Michele Roberts from the Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform (EJHA) and one of the authors of this year's Seven Weeks for Water.

EJHA is dedicated to chemical safety and supporting healthy, toxic-free communities where people can safely live, work, play, pray and go to school. WCC-EWN talked to Michele about challenges to safe drinking water in the USA, how these are closely related to systemic racism, and possible solutions to achieve water justice for all.

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/usa-race-and-income-determine-access-to-clean-water-interview-with-michele-roberts>



Photo: WCC

North America: Water cut-offs a sin and stupidity, says NCCCUSA

The National Council of the Churches in the USA (NCCCUSA) has strongly condemned the practice of disconnecting people from water because they cannot afford to pay their bills. "The United States is blessed with abundant water resources and, yet, it is necessary for two Michigan Congresswomen, Rashida Tlaib and Debbie Dingell, to introduce the Emergency Water is a Human Right Act in order to forestall water shutoffs for low-income households," said Jim Winkler, president and general secretary of the NCCCUSA.

"Denying water to people living in poverty is a sin and in the midst of the Covid-19 panic when frequent handwashing is crucial it is utter stupidity. I call on the US Congress to enact this legislation as soon as possible."

[Press release by Congresswomen Rashida Tlaib](#)

[Revealed: millions of Americans can't afford water as bills rise 80% in a decade \(The Guardian, 23 June 2020\)](#)



Photo: WCC

Switzerland: Plebiscites related to water

Swiss Church Aid (HEKS) reports that there is currently a broad discussion going on in Switzerland regarding the quality of its drinking water and how to protect it. Two popular initiatives have been introduced and will be voted on in 2021: "For clean drinking water and healthy food" and "For a Switzerland without synthetic pesticides".

"These plebiscites are both strongly connected with the right to clean water, and with aspects related also to global challenges," highlights Karl Heuberger, thematic advisor on access to water, HEKS. The Blue Community Switzerland of which HEKS is a member has elaborated a [short briefing](#) (currently only available in German) on the initiatives outlining key arguments and principles.

India: World Water Day competition by Church of South India

The Church of South India (CSI) is organizing a competition in collaboration with WCC-EWN, asking people to share their videos, stories and photographs on water in India. "We will select the best entries and cash awards will be given. This campaign is to encourage churches to talk about water issues," explains Dr Mathew Koshy Punnackad, from the CSI Synod Department of Ecological Concerns. The synod is also calling on all its dioceses and schools to organize activities to celebrate World Water Day.

[See "Water Warriors of 2021"](#)

Please also note the following webinars by NCCI

[Water and Climate Justice Webinar: Increased Exclusion of Vulnerable Groups | NCCI-URM webinar](#)

["Valuing Water in India" a webinar on World Water Day](#)

UPCOMING



Photo: WCC

22 March: Webinar with UN Special Rapporteur

On March 22 all over the world people observe World Water Day. This year's theme is Valuing Water. "Water means different things to different people. Unfortunately, in today's market driven trend, the economic value of water supersedes the spiritual and ethical values of water," says Dinesh Suna, WCC-EWN Coordinator. "As church and faith-based organisations, it is our moral imperative to ensure that water for life gets the priority over water for profit."

To explore this issue deeper WCC-EWN is organizing a joint event on 22 March, 15.00 – 16.30 (CET), in collaboration with the office of the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Right to Water and Sanitation.

Details about registration will soon be available

Link to www.worldwaterday.org

Webinar series: Seven Weeks for Water 2021

WCC-EWN is organizing a series of webinars including the authors of the Seven Weeks for Water 2021.

Please look out for more details in the following website: [Seven Weeks for Water 2021](http://SevenWeeksforWater2021.org)

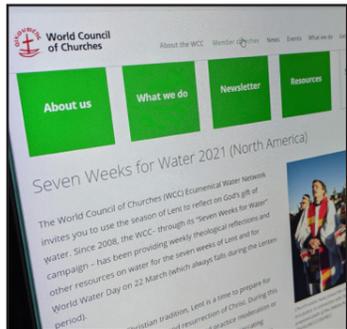


Photo: WCC

Photo of the month Holy Water



Holy water plays a major role in Christianity. In many churches there are holy water basins to make the sign of the cross with consecrated water upon entering the church. In Germany, these basins have remained empty due to the COVID-19 crisis. Thanks to an innovative idea by one of its members, the Catholic congregation in Barbing, Germany, has been able to offer holy water despite the pandemic.

Pastor Stefan Wissel is grateful and proud that one of his parishioners helped design a mechanical holy water dispenser with an integrated offering box which now stands in his church. It is operated by pressing a foot pedal.

"The believers want their holy water", the pastor makes clear. "Contactless and without batteries, it not only meets the hygienic criteria, but also ecological ones."

Photo and story used with kind permission by the Katholisches Pfarramt Barbing.

Do you have a photo that tells a story about water? Please share it with the EWN community by sending it to water@wcc-coe.org

A moment for water



Photo: Maïke Gorsborh

The Desert: What do we thirst for?

In the first ever reflection of the Seven Weeks for Water back in 2008, Jane Stranz wrote about Lent as a time to discover and listen to the physical and spiritual thirsts of our world and link that to our own thirst and God's promise of water in the desert.

I will open rivers on the bare heights
And springs in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water
And the dry land fountains of water.
Isaiah 41:18

As a deer longs for flowing streams,
so my soul longs for you, O God.
Psalm 42.1

The biblical promise from the prophet Isaiah is that the dry lands can spring with fountains, that wells of fresh water are possible, even in the desert, even when there is no justice in the way water is distributed and paid for.

The beginning of Lent focuses on the desert, remembering the 40 days Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness at the beginning of his ministry and how the people of God were fed during their desert wanderings in the book of Exodus. Lent is a time for spiritual reflection, for thinking, learning and renewed commitment. A time to discover and listen to the physical and spiritual thirsts of our world and link that to our own thirst and God's promise of water in the desert.

More than a billion people thirst for access to enough clean water. Across the world inland lakes and seas dry up, rivers continue to be polluted and deserts increase in size. Making water a fundamental human right is a matter of survival for one in six human beings.

As Christians begin the Lenten pilgrimage we recognize that we live on a planet of plenty yet are nevertheless in a parched place, longing like the deer for living waters, thirsting for God's promise of water and of justice.

The image of water refreshing the desert offers a deep well of hope to all living through the devastation of drought and death. In all human yearning for meaning, satisfaction, peace and justice, water in the desert offers the real hope of renewal and profound change.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES



screengrab from the documentary

Guatemala: Granadillas, source of water and life

The mountain range Las Granadillas is the main water source for the local population and cultural and spiritual home of the indigenous Maya Chortí people. For many years, the Association to Protect Montaña Las Granadillas (APMG) has worked to address problems such as deforestation from legal and illegal logging, the use of large private land areas for livestock and monocrops, and the obstruction of access to water sources, among others.

Since the beginning, APMG has been backed by the Lutheran Church in Guatemala (ILUGUA). A new video released by ILUGUA shows the importance, and the beauty, of the Las Granadillas. It tells of the difficult struggle of local communities to protect their rights against powerful landowners. The video is mostly in Spanish, with a short part in English (7:50 – 9:50).

[Video: Montaña Las Granadillas - Fuente de Vida](#)

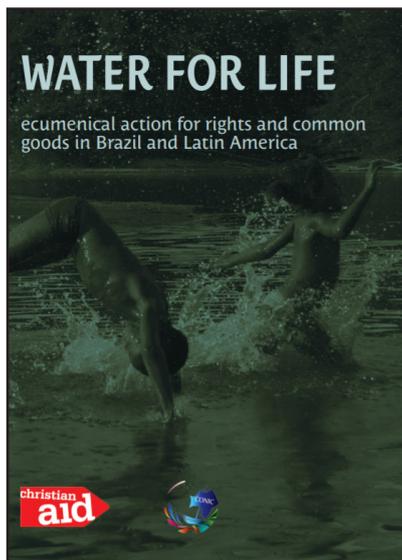


screengrab from the documentary

Emmy-Awarded Documentary "I Stand: Guardians of the Water"

The film documents first-hand interviews and on the ground footage to give a stirring account of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation's and water protectors' opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. The Producer/Director - Kyle Kauwika Harris has authorized Rev. Dr. John Floberg, host of the WCC Pilgrimage of Justice Peace team visits to Standing Rock to share it widely.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/386389930> (Password: StandingRock)



Brazil: Águas para Vida – Waters for Life

The book “Waters for Life: ecumenical action for rights and common goods in Brazil and Latin America”, has been jointly launched by CONIC and Christian Aid. The publication is the result of a two-year project aimed at strengthening the work of faith-based organizations in the defence of water in Brazil. The book features reflections on the project’s learnings and includes a practical advocacy guide. In the second part of the publication, case studies of communities facing problems in access to water are presented.

[Link to Portugese version](#)

[Link to English version](#)



Advocating for universal WASH services

If you are interested in water advocacy, check out the campaign website of #VoicesforWater for a lot of interesting examples, stories and other resources meant to inspire and strengthen your advocacy efforts. The newly launched #VoicesforWater campaign is about highlighting the power civil society organisations have in driving change for Sustainable Development Goal 6: ensuring clean water and sanitation for all.

Campaign website: <https://voicesforwater.watershed.nl/en/>

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