I THIRST:
Water Reflections for Lent

We praise you, Lord, for Sister Water, so useful, humble, precious and pure.

St. Francis of Assisi
I Thirst: Water Reflections for Lent

For Convener:

This material was created to help people deepen their reflections on “I Thirst” during Lent by appreciating God's gift of water, the divine presence living and acting within it, current water conditions on Earth, and how we can respond in faith.

Please make copies on both sides of sustainable paper.

Be creative with this material. Adapt it in any way that facilitates sharing, community building, and prayerful reflection.

Confirm with participants the dates, times, and location of the first meeting. These can be altered for future meetings if the entire group agrees. Stop in time to complete the closing and socializing. Acquire desired material from the following suggestions or assign volunteers to secure it; pre-play music and media before using to be sure everything works correctly.

Some suggested music:
Water Music: GF Handel       "With Joy We Shall Draw Water," R. Hurd
"Canticle of the Sun," M. Haugen  "Psalm 42" (As the Deer Longs)
"Come to Me and Drink," R.Hurd       "Come to the Water," J. Foley

Week One:  • If needed, provide easy-to-read name cards for each participant. When participants are absent, put names in the center to remember them in prayer.
• Sufficient number of booklets       • Music as wanted
• Centerpiece of pitcher filled with tap water (definitely not bottled)
• A lovely glass for each person

Week Two:  • Prepare Spirited Water (www.seescapes.com/spiritedwater, c. 5:20 min.)
    • Music as wanted

Week Three:  • Music as wanted

Week Four:  • Tapped (or Flow - For Love of Water, or Blue Gold), all free on YouTube
Decide how much to use that will allow time for discussion.

Week Five:  • "Were You There" tape or words if needed       • Wooden crucifix
Lent, Week One: The Wonder of Water

I. Intro
Welcome, intros (name cards). Hopes for your time with this group? Look through booklet. Decide about refreshments at future meetings and, if wanted, how food/water will be provided.

Begin the meeting by "changing gears" with whatever will help participants remember the divine presence – quiet reflection, music, etc. Then read the following Scripture:

Matthew 4: 2-3: Jesus prepared for the test by fasting forty days and forty nights. That left him, of course, in a state of extreme hunger [and thirst!] ….

Silent reflection, followed by sharing: What is the thirstiest you can remember being?

II. Input
Whatever the actual time in the desert was, it seems safe to assume that Jesus was in a state of extreme thirst. Humans can live without food for weeks, but after one day without water, dehydration leading to death can begin. When the King welcomed into heaven those who gave drink to anyone thirsty (Mt. 34 - 46), he knew whereof he spoke. Why else might Jesus have needed water during his life?

We now know more about water than anyone in Jesus' time could have guessed. Like Earth itself, Sister Water dates ultimately to stars! Astronomers have detected water vapor whose light fingerprint has traveled 12 billion years! Earth is about 4.5 billion years old. Its original source of water is not certain. All life that preceded us, starting with the earliest life forms and including Jesus' life, depended on water. Earth's finite water supply is continually being recycled — rain, steam, glaciers, oceans, etc. — to become reusable so we and future generations can benefit from it.

Far from being just a resource:
- Water is a vital member of creation's communion of subjects;
- Water is a vital substance in every living cell of nearly every creature;
- Earth's surface is about 70% water! 60 - 70% of human body (by weight) is also water. Where is the water in your body?

- Water helps build animal and human communities; it shapes the land; it drives climate and weather; it shapes politics and policies; it provides beauty, majesty, energy, and emotional experience; it is used in the manufacture of many products; it cools and warms us. Which of these physical benefits is especially meaningful to you?
God reveals divine presence through creation's water. Water has key roles in rituals and sacraments. Examples? Sacred Scripture contains over 500 references to water. Think of one that appeals to you. How can that story or quote influence your life now?

Etty Hillesum (Holocaust victim) spoke of the well of her inner life becoming repeatedly cluttered with stones, gravel, and debris. Repeatedly she dug it out and found that clear cool water rose up from the depths and refreshed her. Endless sources of life-giving water remain deep within us, but our well needs vigilant cherishing.

III. What is God saying to us?
Have you had any "religious experience" connected with water?
If negative water experiences, how did you deal with them?
How does the divine presence touch your life through water?

IV. This week (and this Lent): Drink and use "Sister Water" (e.g., showering, washing dishes and clothes, entering and leaving church, watering gardens or shoveling snow . . .) with greater awareness, reverence, and wonder. "Wonder is not just another emotion; it is rather an opening into the heart of the universe." (B. Swimme and M.E. Tucker) Everyone prepare to share next week anything significant about your Baptism — date, circumstances, etc. — and what Baptism means to you. Mark your calendar for March 22, World Water Day. Take your booklet home and bring it each week. Who will write a prayer about water to start our session next week and (same prayer) to end Week Three?

V. Closing: Stand around the water centerpiece. One person reverently pours water into each glass. When all have water, pray together:

All: A water molecule born billion of years ago has, on Earth, repeatedly become steam, clouds, rain, glaciers, oceans, rivers, dew, water in wells and aquifers, water in the faucet, water in these glasses, in our mouths, our veins, our brains, our dreams — even making possible our prayer:

Creator and Sustainer God, present in water everywhere, may your love, like water, pour over our thirsty spirits, cleansing, refreshing, and renewing us this Lent. Help us become more mindful of water.

Let us remember those who might have drunk these molecules of water — maybe Jesus! May drinking it unite us mindfully with creation's intercommunion of subjects.

Leader: Like the deer that yearns for running streams,
All: So my soul is yearning for you, my God. Amen.

Drink the water, savoring it in silence. Socialize.
Lent, Week Two: World Water Facts

I. Intro
If someone asked what Week One was about, what would you say? Share any related experience/insight/quote from the week.

Volunteer reads prayer s/he wrote, followed by silent reflection. Then read:

**Genesis 12: 1:** God told Abram: "Leave your country, your family, and your father's home for a land that I will show you."  
**John 3:5:** Unless a person is born again – the wind hovering over the water's creation, the invisible moving the visible, a baptism into a new life — it's not possible to enter God's kingdom.

What is your Baptism date? What does “God’s kingdom” mean to you?

II. Input
Watch Healing Earth — Our Common Blessing.

Read the following in turn:
- Only 1% of all the water on Earth is fresh and liquid and usable.
- About 1/5 of the fresh water available is in the Great Lakes.
- The present global population is about 7.6 billion people — and increasing.
- Statistics vary about the number who have no access to clean drinking water. This situation is improving, but hundreds of thousands still have no access. How many is acceptable?
- UNICEF states that every day, 6,000 children die of preventable water-related diseases.
- Drought, desertification, or flooding threaten the lives of at least 1 billion people in over 110 countries.

Many Church statements affirm that the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis notes how indispensable water is not just “for human life,” but also “for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.” (27) Can you give examples of ecosystems?

He also notes that water sources are threatened ‘by “the pollution produced in certain mining, farming and industrial activities … It is not only a question of industrial waste. Detergents and chemical products … continue to pour into our rivers, lakes and seas.” (29)

A report by Archbishop Veglio, president of the Pontifical Council for Migrants, states, in part: *People are moving away, since they can no longer make a living as a result of desertification and growing water scarcity, increasing sea-levels and 'salinisation' of agricultural land. Climate
change is also increasingly causing natural disasters, like flooding and storms. As a result, conflicts about resources increase.

This new form of displacement will have enormous consequences for decades to come. The frequently-cited and accepted estimate of 200 million climate induced displaced persons by 2050 indicates the gigantic dimensions of the problem. Human migration will undoubtedly be one of the most significant consequences of the change in climate.

The "best" responses to these facts include grief and responsibility. Guilt does no good!

III. What is God saying to us?
The Scripture is certainly direct: Jesus said that whatever you do for anyone, you do it for him. Jesus probably thought "anyone" meant humans, but human nature is integral to all nature. How does the meaning of "anyone" change because creation is a communion of subjects?

IV. This week: Find a meaningful poem or hymn about water to share next week — and perhaps to share with others on Wednesday, March 22, World Water Day.

V. Closing:
Spontaneous prayers: e.g.:
I thank God for deeper appreciation of/for . . . .
I grieve . . . .
I ask for the grace to . . . .

End together:
Bless us as we use Earth's water, Holy Mystery. May we use and appreciate water remembering that it is sacred. May we be mindful of how water blesses our lives. May we live our lives aware that our actions affect creation throughout the world. Amen.
Lent, Week Three: Some Issues Contributing to the World Water Situation

I. Intro
Begin with quiet reflection as usual. Invite participants to share poetry, song, or hymn (or story, e.g., Helen Keller) about water and what they like about it. Then read:

Exodus 17: 2-3: There wasn't a drop of water for the people to drink . . . The people were thirsty for water. They complained to Moses . . . God said . . . Strike the rock and water will gush out of it . . .

John 4: 6: Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."
How do these readings relate to today's world? What could you answer if anyone asks why we should conserve water?

II. Input
Read silently the following causes of water pollution and scarcity, many of which "cross-cut" (issues that impact other issues). Week Four's film will detail others:

- **Industrial animal production** is at or near the top of the worldwide list for water usage, water pollution, topsoil loss, tropical rainforest destruction, and desertification. It takes 2500 gallons of water and many pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef. Abstaining from meat on Fridays evidently had global benefits no one realized! What are other reasons that motivate people to abstain from beef?

- **Industrial agriculture** (factory farming) Obviously, crops need water to thrive, but intensive agricultural practices exert more stress on watersheds than rainfed cultivation of ecologically appropriate crops. The worldwide expansion of industrial-scale cultivation of water-intensive crops on marginal land magnifies the pressure on already overstretched water resources. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides run off the land to pollute water sources.

- **Synthetic chemicals** from laundry and dishwashing soaps and chlorine bleaches pollute rivers, lakes, and coastal areas. Phosphates cause large buildups of algae and bacteria that rob water bodies of oxygen, thus choking other life forms. Drugs flushed in toilets and sinks pollute water.

- **Hydraulic fracturing (fracking)**, a method to remove gas from shale, uses large amounts of water with chemicals that result in the water's becoming excessively contaminated, including with radioactivity. It requires considerable treatment before being discharged, or is stored in outdoor pits, or injected into deep wells, causing land tremors in some areas. (Though its statistics are dated, "Time for an Energy Change": http://ecospiritualityresources.com/media still has helpful information.)

- **Mountaintop removal** for coal results in waste that is dumped into valleys, blocking streams. Excess water from coal processing includes toxic chemicals (sludge).
• **Climate change** exacerbates drought and flooding in many parts of the world. Rising sea levels are inundating low-lying shorelines and drowning islands. As we read last week, because of severe weather events and drought, people migrate, become refugees and hence more vulnerable to increased poverty and trafficking.

• **Energy uses** ([www.ucsusa.org/energy-water](http://www.ucsusa.org/energy-water)) It takes 70 gallons of water to produce 4 gallons of gasoline, and the same amount to produce one pound of plastic.

• **Shortsighted cost-cutting**, such as happened in Flint, Michigan, when officials failed to apply corrosion inhibitors to its drinking water, resulting in lead contamination.

• **Bottled water** (More on this Week Four)

**III. What is God saying to — and through — us?**

As you review these and other issues that damage and threaten water and all life, listen for God’s call in your heart. Perhaps a call to lament and grieve the causes of pollution and scarcity; a call to learn more; a call to better reverence and to be more grateful for water; a desire to conserve water by wise use of it; a determination to lobby for better protection of rivers, lakes, and oceans. Perhaps you'll "hear" connections between issues and one or more Stations of the Cross or one or more of Jesus' last words. For example, millions of people are condemned to death by water pollution and scarcity. Many are forced to say: “I am thirsty.” Take a few minutes to consider the issues, especially how these water facts connect with Lent. (Reflect, then Share.)

As we respond to our call to protect water for Earth and all its inhabitants, we do not act alone. God empowers us to connect with all those who work to protect Earth's water. With them, we can be confident because "God can do anything, far more than you could ever ask or imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! Divine Love does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, God's Spirit deeply and gently within us." Eph. 3: 20 - 21

**IV. This week:**

Take action on at least one of the facts we considered during this meeting. For example, transition to renewable energy sources for your electricity; reduce frequency of eating meat; increase purchases of organically-grown food….

**V. Closing:** Read *Laudato Si’* par. 27 - 31 (p. 9) silently. When most have finished (others can finish at home), share reactions.

The volunteer who wrote the prayer for Week Two concludes the meeting by reading that prayer.
Chapter II. The Issue of Water

27. Other indicators of the present situation have to do with the depletion of natural resources. We all know that it is not possible to sustain the present level of consumption in developed countries and wealthier sectors of society, where the habit of wasting and discarding has reached unprecedented levels. The exploitation of the planet has already exceeded acceptable limits and we still have not solved the problem of poverty.

28. Fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems. Source of fresh water are necessary for health care, agriculture and industry. Water supplies used to be relatively constant, but now in many places demand exceeds the sustainable supply, with dramatic consequences in the short and long term. Large cities dependent on significant supplies of water have experienced periods of shortage, and at critical moments these have not always been administered with sufficient oversight and impartiality. Water poverty especially affects Africa where large sectors of the population have no access to safe drinking water or experience droughts which impede agricultural production. Some countries have areas rich in water while others endure drastic scarcity.

29. One particularly serious problem is the quality of water available to the poor. Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, included those caused by microorganisms and chemical substances. Dysentery and cholera, linked to inadequate hygiene and water supplies, are a significant cause of suffering and of infant mortality. Underground water sources in many places are threatened by the pollution produced in certain mining, farming and industrial activities, especially in countries lacking adequate regulation or controls. It is not only a question of industrial waste. Detergents and chemical products, commonly used in many places of the world, continue to pour into our rivers, lakes and seas.

30. Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt toward the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to life consistent with their inalienable dignity. This debt can be paid partly by an increase in funding to provide clean water and sanitary services among the poor. But water continues to be wasted, not only in the developed world but also in developing countries which possess it in abundance. This shows that the problem of water is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behavior within the context of great inequality.

31. … the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century.
Lent, Week Four: Who Owns Water?

I. Intro
After quiet reflection, read Scripture:
Ps. 23: 1-3: God, my shepherd, I don't need a thing. You have bedded me down in lush meadows, you find me quiet pools to drink from.
John 9: 6-7: He . . . spit in the dust, made a clay paste with the saliva, rubbed the paste on the blind man's eyes, and said, "Go, wash at the Pool of Siloam." The man went and washed — and saw.
What do these readings mean to you, especially in light of the degradation and scarcity of water we read about and discussed at our last meeting?

II. Input
Watch all, or a section of, the film you have chosen (cf. p. 2). Allow time to reflect on what you learned. Share your response to the film in one word or phrase.

III. What is God saying to us?
Admittedly, using bottled water is handy. Yet some say the most important thing we can do to protect water is to stop using bottled water.

What do find most motivating in this list of problems connected with bottled water: consumer cost; water required (one liter "inside" plus two liters for production); pollution (over 17 million barrels of oil are needed to produce the 31.2 billion liter-bottles used in the U.S. in 2006; these bottles created over 2.5 million tons of CO₂ in 2006); 93% are contaminated with micro-pieces of plastic that drinkers ingest; injustice; severe damage to oceans and life within oceans; selling water otherwise needed (e.g., during droughts in California and Phoenix, when water needed by local populations continued to be sold by Nestle).

IV. This Week:
What action might individuals (and groups) take to protect water for our future? (E.g., join a local group working to improve water conditions; use one of the many thermos available for water; inform parishioners or friends about bottled water; . . .)
Make plans to celebrate after the final meeting.

V. By now it will be late, so no official closing this week.

FYI: Alternatives to Nestle and Pepsi: Boxed water: Cadbury Schweppes Americas Beverages make and distribute the following in the USA: Dr. Pepper; 7 UP; Snapple; Motts; Schweppes; RC Cola; A & W Root beer; Sunkist Soda; Canada Dry; Welch's; Hawaiian Punch; Diet Rite Virgil's Root Beer and Ginger Ale in glass bottles.
Lent, Week Five: Behold, behold, the Wood of the Cross

I. Intro
Place the wooden crucifix where it is visible to all. Share any water insights or experiences from the past week.

John 11: 33 - 35: When Jesus saw her sobbing and the Jews with her sobbing, a deep anger welled up within him. He said, "Where did you put him?" "Master, come and see," they said. Now, Jesus wept.

John 19: 28: "I am thirsty."

Quiet reflection. Who weeps today? Who is thirsty? (Include Mother Earth!)

II. Input
The tree that became Jesus' cross had a history that dated back to the beginning of trees, about 370 million years ago and ultimately to stardust, like everything earthly. The wood on the cross pictured here, and trees in your yards and everywhere, all share that history.

Trees protect water. They require water to grow, but they also give water. The leaves of an acre of trees can release 8,000 gallons of water into the air in a day! Trees filter carbon dioxide in our atmosphere, protect biological diversity and endangered species, reduce stress on humans, and improve people's moods. Rain forests are an important breathing mechanism for Planet Earth. It took 60 million years for rain forests to evolve into Earth's lungs. Trees prevent erosion, soak up nutrients before they run into wetlands or sewers, and improve the soil. Deforestation is responsible for 10-15% of all global greenhouse gas emissions. 2004 Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai began a movement to reforest her country by paying poor women a few shillings to plant trees. The prize affirmed that protecting and planting trees contribute to peace. What is the connection?

80% the rainforest in the Amazon is cleared for cattle ranching. Activists trying to protect the land, trees, water and climate face violent opposition and death. Sister Dorothy Stang, SND, was murdered in 2005 for her efforts to stop loggers and ranchers from appropriating rainforest land in Brazil. Among many global martyrs for land/ ecology are Chico Mendez, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Chut Wutty.

III. What is God saying to us?
Palms will be blessed with holy water before distribution on Palm Sunday. On Holy Thursday parishioners will participate in the ritual washing of feet. On Good Friday we will remember Jesus' words on the cross, "I am thirsty." On Holy Saturday we will participate (at least in spirit) in the blessing of holy water, Baptisms, and renewal of Baptismal promises. Sunday we will be sprinkled with holy water. We'll picture resurrection stories with gardens that required water. How might what we've learned about water enrich these Holy Week and Easter experiences?
IV. This week: On Good Friday when we reverence the cross, remember the importance of all trees and their contributions to our lives and to Earth's life systems. Take an action to protect trees this week. For example:

- Use cloth napkins and towels or use napkins, towels and kleenex made from sustainable paper;
- Use 100% recycled or sustainable paper for printer/copy paper;
- Get off lists of junk mail and phone books ([https://www.dmchoice.org/](https://www.dmchoice.org/); [https://www.catalogchoice.org/](https://www.catalogchoice.org/); 1-888-5-OPTOUT);
- Plant trees that will be cared for to maturity locally or, e.g., [www.treesforthefuture.org/](http://www.treesforthefuture.org/); [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org);
- Reduce use of products made with palm oil;
- Contact your legislators and ask what s/he is doing/will do to protect water and trees.

FYI, Arbor Day in 2020 is April 24.

V. Closing: Play and/or sing "Were You There." [crucified; nailed him to the tree; laid him in the tomb] Pass and venerate the crucifix as you wish. Sing until all have held the crucifix. Then pray together:

Creator God, present within us and all creation, your waters refresh our bodies and give life to the Earth. From the hardness of our hearts bring forth the waters of compassion and care. Open our hearts to the water crisis of our world. Guide us in ways we can reduce our waste and over-consumption of your resources. Teach us to use our sacred waters wisely. (Lent 4.5)

We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy cross we see the nobility of the human spirit and the Spirit of God at work. We see how you were ready to stand by your convictions despite the cost, despite the consequences. We are humbled, inspired, and grateful. Amen.

VI. Evaluation

- Share one word — or very few — that sum(s) up the I Thirst experience for you.

VII. Share gratitude with one another for what each contributed to I Thirst.

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