

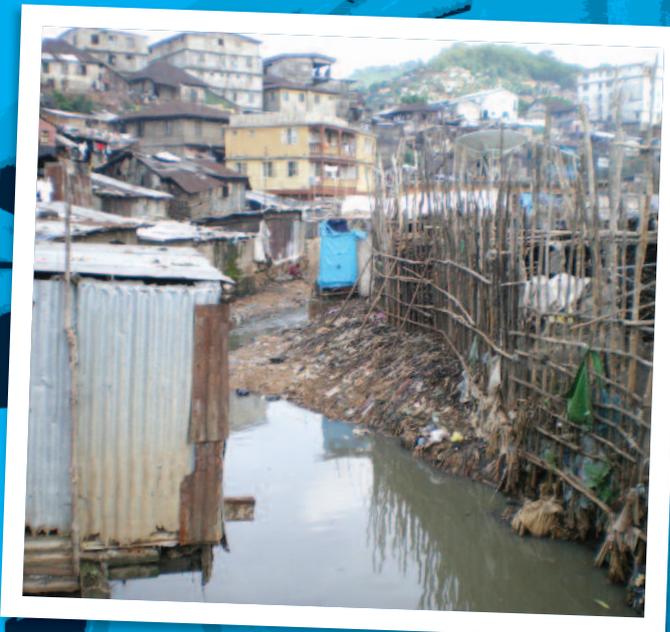
# WATER

**1.1 Billion people worldwide lack access to clean water.**

**1.8 million children die each year from waterborne diseases – one every 10 seconds.**

**5.3 billion people, two thirds of the world's population, will suffer from water shortages by 2050.**

**The average American family uses 293 gallons of water per day; the average African family uses 5 gallons.**



In 1966, the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights established the right to water as a human right in Articles 11 and 12.

In 1999, the Dublin Conference on Water and the Environment established four principles that have subsequently guided world water policy: (1) fresh water is a finite and vulnerable resource; (2) water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy-makers at all levels; (3) women play a central role in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water; (4) water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.



**Global consumption of water doubles every 20 years – more than twice the rate of human population growth.**



**ANGELICAN ALLIANCE**  
Development • Relief • Advocacy

In 2001, 800 delegates from 35 countries attended the Water for Peace and Nature Summit in Vancouver. They endorsed and signed the "Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Commons," which says: "the intrinsic value of the Earth's fresh water precedes its utility and commercial value," and that "the Earth's water belongs to the Earth and all species, and therefore must not be treated as a private commodity to be bought, sold, and traded for profit."

**While it is obviously true that we need water for basic survival, continuing attempts to categorize water as a "need," rather than a "right" have been legal attempts to justify privatization – that is to say, companies claim that their mission is to fulfill this basic "need."**



# WHAT THE CHURCHES CAN DO

- **Church leaders, lay and ordained, must speak directly to government representatives at all levels – local, regional, and national – about the right to safe, clean water and preserving that right as a basic public trust.**
- **Use the water in your baptismal font both as a sacrament and as an educational tool linking spiritual teachings, environmental stewardship practices, and basic human rights.**
- **Invite women in your congregation to share their experiences about the significance of water, its uses, and the issues surrounding it.**
- **Visit nearby wells, streams, and rivers with your congregations and communities to examine and bless the water.**
- **Implement water conservation strategies in your parish church or other places of worship.**

## BIBLE STUDY – THE RIGHT TO WATER: THE RIGHT TO LIFE

### INTRODUCTION

The Bible talks repeatedly about water. The Spirit hovered over water at the beginning of creation. Water is a common theme in stories about sustaining life and communities. There are many accounts of women collecting water, including the Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at the well. In the New Testament, water becomes symbolic of new life in Christ.

In this story from Genesis 21, God provides water to save the lives of Hagar and her son, Ishmael. Hagar, a slave and a foreigner and the mother of Abraham's son, was rejected and sent out into the desert with her child.

### GENESIS 21: 14-19 – GOD PROVIDES WATER TO SAVE LIFE

Thanksgiving for Earth's Bounty

Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the Desert of Beersheba.

When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the bushes. Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, "I cannot watch the boy die." And as she sat there, she began to sob.

God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."

Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.



## PRAYER

Loving Father,

*We rejoice in your gift of water in creation. We give thanks for the resource of clean, safe water that sustains life. We ask your forgiveness where we have misused water supplies or not cared about others. We pray for places where people and creation suffer from lack of water. Please guide humanity to come together to preserve and share water for the life and flourishing of all.*

*In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.*

## DISCUSSION

You may wish to open in prayer. Read the Bible passage twice and then discuss these questions:

### In biblical times:

- What do you think this passage is about? Please retell it in your own words.
- What factors made Hagar so powerless in this situation?
- What did Hagar experience when her son was dying of thirst?
- How did God respond to the suffering of this foreign female slave?



- What do we learn from this story about God's care for the most vulnerable?

### In our own times:

- What do we recognise from this story in our world today? What is our prayer?
- God showed particular concern for the most vulnerable: a woman and a child who were enslaved foreigners. Who are the most vulnerable in our communities and world? How should the Church respond?
- Discuss some specific situations and consider why people are denied the right to enough water and clean water.
- "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (Amos 5:24) What does justice mean in relation to water access in our world? Do we help or harm others in our personal use of water?
- What practical actions can we commit to take at individual and community level to change our own practices and to advocate for the right to water?

## FURTHER PASSAGES FOR READING

John 4: 5-15

Amos 5: 12-13, 24

## REFERENCES AND OTHER BIBLE STUDIES

Bible text cited from New International Version 1979

Ecumenical Water Network:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/activities/ewn-home>

[www.tearfund.org/en/what\\_we\\_do\\_and\\_where/issues/water\\_and\\_sanitation](http://www.tearfund.org/en/what_we_do_and_where/issues/water_and_sanitation)

[www.wateraid.org/uk](http://www.wateraid.org/uk)

[www.arocha.org](http://www.arocha.org)