

July 2003
Issue One

Watermark

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Important dates:

4 October 2003
Feast of St Francis
Patron Saint of
Ecology

Conference of Leaders of Religious Institutes (NSW)

The Importance of Water

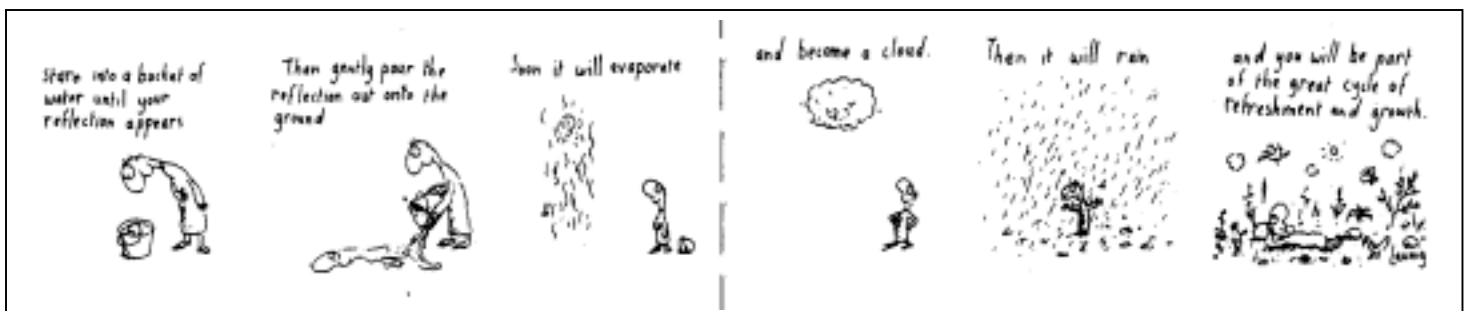
In this, the International Year of Freshwater, we are once again called to reflect on the words of Pope John Paul II:

[i]f one looks at the regions of our planet, one realizes immediately that humanity has disappointed the divine expectation. Above all in our time, man has unhesitatingly devastated wooded plains and valleys, polluted waters, deformed the earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable, upset the hydrogeological and atmospheric systems, blighted green spaces, implemented uncontrolled forms of industrialization, humiliating the earth, that flower-bed that is our dwelling... It is necessary, therefore, to stimulate and sustain the ecological conversion... In this newfound harmony with nature and with themselves, men and women will once again walk in the garden of creation.

As the source of all life, water is vital to us all. It is not an infinite resource that can be squandered indefinitely, although many treat it as though it were. Health, sanitation, food and leisure, amongst other things, are all affected by our access to water. Consequently, all of us must take responsibility for the water that we use. We must ask ourselves what kind of future we want for the planet and for the subsequent generations whose livelihood depends on the decisions we now make. Be it at a local or at a global level, the information on the following pages provides a means through which we can all empower ourselves to make the right choices and, in so doing, to protect the gifts God gave us.

How To Be Of Value

By Michael Leunig



How much water can you save today?

With voluntary water restrictions still in force it's important to save as much water as you can – inside as well as outside the home.

1. Take shorter showers – save up to 2 buckets (18 litres) of water per minute.



2. Use the half-flush on your toilet when you can – save around 4 buckets (36 litres) of water per person per day.



3. Only use washing machines and dishwashers when you've got a full load – save up to 17 buckets (153 litres) of water per load.



4. Do all three, and you could save up to 23 buckets (207 litres) a day!



For more easy ways to save water
visit sydneywater.com.au

Local Issues

Saving Water

We must save water now because:

- only 3% of the water on the planet is freshwater,
- only 0.001% of the freshwater on the planet is available for use by plants, animals and humans as the rest is locked away in polar ice caps and glaciers,
- Australia is the driest of the inhabited continents,
- NSW is currently in the grip of a devastating drought,
- each Australian consumes approximately 1,000,000 litres of water per year, 250,000 litres of which are used domestically,
- the Murray Darling Basin drains 14% of the continent with 80% of its water flow diverted for use by humans, and
- whilst 75% of Australia's developed water is used for irrigation and only 25% is used for industrial and domestic purposes, by altering our behaviour we can make a real difference in the use of that 25%.

Much of the above information is from Environ Magazine, March 2003

Salinity

Salinity can be categorised into three main groups: dryland, irrigation and urban salinity. Whilst the first of these occurs when there is a build up of salt on the soil surface in non-irrigated areas, the second occurs where there has been over irrigation, inefficient water use and poor drainage. Urban salinity is caused by a combination of dryland salinity and over-watering in town and urban areas.

Salinity is one of the gravest environmental problems currently facing Australia because:

- it threatens the health and productivity of many catchments throughout Australia as well as the communities that live within them,
- salinity affects up to 500,000 hectares of land in NSW alone, and
- if we fail to change our behaviour dramatically, current projections estimate that millions of hectares could be lost to salinity by 2050.

Salinity is not just a rural issue. As it directly affects farmers, Indigenous communities, town and urban dwellers, and the land of which we are all a part, it should be of concern to us all.

*The above information is from the Department of Land and Water Conservation:
<http://dlwc.nsw.gov.au/care/salinity>*

Global Issues

The Right to Water

Although Article 25 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948) stipulates that we all have the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of ourselves and of our families, for many around the world, this right is presently being violated. In the world today:

- 1.1 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water,
- 80% of those without access to safe drinking water are rural poor,
- a child dies every 15 seconds from diarrhea, largely as a result of poor sanitation and water supply,
- over 1 billion people must travel for more than one kilometre to obtain water,
- the role of water in the lives of many indigenous communities is under threat from careless development and the lack of access to freshwater that results, and
- the sufficiency, safety, affordability and accessibility of water are being undermined by the privatisation of water.

*The above information is from a report published by WHO entitled *The Right to Water*: http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/Documents/righttowater/righttowater.pdf*

Crisis and Response

Statistics demonstrate that as we get richer, we are increasingly degrading our environment. Moreover, as we poison the planet on which we live, we appear to be caring less and less about its destruction.

This spreading indifference is a special challenge to those of us called by Pope John Paul II to ecological conversion:

- How do we overcome the feeling of powerlessness in the face of the power of multinationals who are the major pollutants?
- How do we live the Church's call to think globally and act locally?
- How do we ensure that our personal actions are reflected in the way our economic and political systems are structured?
- How do we nurture the courage to look, to explain what we see, to allow ourselves to be moved and to do something concrete?

As global citizens, the Earth Charter offers us some possibilities...

cf. Compass 37(1) (Autumn 2003), pp. 3 – 10.

“Access to water is a fundamental human need and, therefore, a basic human right. Contaminated water jeopardizes both the physical and social health of all people. It is an affront to human dignity.”

Kofi Annan

United Nations Secretary General

“Water is a common good of humankind. For water users living in poverty, the availability of water is a right to life issue.”

Archbishop Martino

President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

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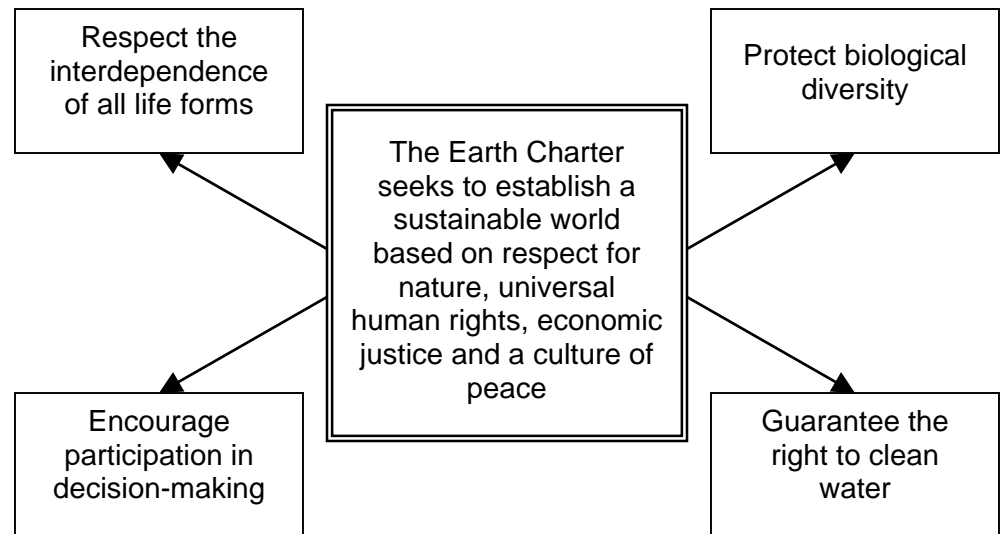
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We are now on the
Web!

www.clrinsw.org

You can read this
issue of
Watermark
on our website.

The Earth Charter



A Process for Moving Forward

In order to move forward we need the courage to look, explain, feel and act:

- look at the critical areas affected by our abuse of water,
- explain to ourselves what we see – reflect, write, pray etc,
- feel the suffering that results from our abuse of water, and
- put in place practical ways of conserving water.

The above information is from Pia Gyger, That We May Join Earth and Heaven (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1996).

Further Action

Take further action now by contacting:

- your local, state or federal member of parliament about your concerns,
- Landcare Australia at www.landcareaustralia.com.au
- Australian Conservation Foundation at www.acfonline.org.au
- Conservation Volunteers Australia at www.conservationvolunteers.com.au
- PolMin at www.polmin.com.au
- Australian Catholic Social Justice Council at http://www.acsjc.org.au/CONTENT/publications/documentation/sustaining_creation__an_ecumenical_environment_action_kit.html