

## Corporal Works of Mercy – Respecting Life through “Giving Drink to the Thirsty”

The Corporal Work of Mercy, *Give Drink to the Thirsty*, calls us to be stewards of our water resources – both for use by humans and the rest of God’s creation. Even though access to safe drinking water is a basic human right, not everyone has the ability to quench their thirst with a drink of clean water.

According to the United Nations, approximately 20% of the world’s population lacks access to safe drinking water and 50% lack adequate sanitation. Johns Hopkins School of Public Health estimates 2.3 billion people worldwide suffer from water-borne diseases. More than 12 million people die each year due to unclean drinking water and poor sanitation. Many of these deaths are children under the age of 5 in developing countries.

In addition to water pollution, basic access to water is also increasingly a concern. At current consumption levels, the United Nations estimates that two out of three people will live in water-stressed conditions by 2025. Concerns regarding sustainable water supplies are not limited to the developing world. Water is already a hot political issue in the southwestern United States. Even Minnesota is not immune from water sustainability issues. The recent Minnesota Water Sustainability Framework report identifies 10 critical issues that must be addressed. Failure to do so will jeopardize the state’s ability to ensure an adequate supply of freshwater to sustain its citizens and environment in the future.

Addressing environmental issues from a faith-based perspective, the U.S. bishops launched an Environmental Justice Program in 1993. The program promotes a distinctively Catholic approach to environmental concerns, fosters deeper respect and stewardship of God’s creation, and links environmental protection and social justice. When the bishops established the program, they mandated a broad policy framework encompassing four priority areas. These areas can easily be applied to water resource concerns:

1. **Environmental Justice** - defined as the strong link between social justice and environmental protection emphasizing the needs of the poor.
2. **Sustainable Development** - with an emphasis on social and economic development that not only protects the sustainability of natural resources but promotes a just distribution of these resources today and for future generations.
3. **Worker Protection** - insisting that workers' needs should not be sacrificed at the expense of environmental protection or vice versa.
4. **The “Commons”** - defined as protecting vital global shared resources such as the oceans, land, water and fisheries.

There are many ways to address charity and justice related to water issues (and environmental stewardship more broadly). For the extended version of this article and to learn what steps you can take to *Give Drink to the Thirsty*, go to the Social Justice Committee’s section of St. Stan’s website: [www.ststans.org](http://www.ststans.org).