

Communication 3

What is Water?

What is water? Although this may seem like an obvious question, the answers that we provide often depend on our cultural and religious backgrounds. Traditionally, western cultures, like ours, have treated water as a common property, meaning that water is owned equally by all of us. In recent years, however, western cultures have shifted their understanding of water. Now, water is viewed like any other natural resource, like natural gas, oil, or gold, and unfortunately, for the right price, it can be bought and sold by individuals and corporations. But who owns it? The water from the tap, the river, the rain... who owns it?

As you might expect, this new western understanding of water differs strongly from that of many Indigenous communities. Instead of treating water as a resource that can be bought, it is viewed it as a living being with which all creation has a relationship and a responsibility to protect. For the Ojibway, water is a source of purification, and for the Iroquois, it is a gift from the stars integral to medicine, prayer, and cleansing. In many Indigenous cultures, women have a special association with water: they are the keepers of water, and it is their responsibility to lead water ceremonies which demonstrate a community's respect for water. What we can learn from our Indigenous brother and sisters is that water is a force that sustains, and requires respect and protection.

Although western culture may treat water as a resource that can be used and abused, as Christians we know that it is a very important component of our spiritual life. We know that in the Bible, water is recognized as divine and life-giving. In Genesis 1, we see that the shape and content of all bodies of water are creations of God. In Revelation 21, we are told that, through Jesus, we are freely given a kind of water that sustains our lives and in John 3, we learn that those who enter the Kingdom of God are those who are born of water and the Spirit.

These parts of Scripture show examples of the importance of water to us as Christians. It reminds us that, just as our practical life depends on water, so too does our spiritual nourishment. In the first installment of Right to Water: What's the Issue, we learned that many Indigenous communities do not have access to this vital resource: even where there is access, the quality of water is poor. Understanding that water is important and is a human right, what happens if you have access to water but it isn't clean, useable, or safe? As Christians, we recognize that water nourishes and cleanses, and now we need to care for it as much as it cares for us; we need to be good stewards of the earth.

The following activity will help you and your youth group understand how water is so easily contaminated and how difficult it can be to reverse the damage.



HOW CLEAN IS CLEAN?

Adapted from *The Environmental Protection Agency — USA, March 1999*
Drinking Water Activities for Students & Teachers

When we think about water in our own communities, we often forget about the water under the ground. In comparison with rivers or streams, water in the ground moves very slowly and very calmly underground, sometimes in rivers that are more than one hundred kilometers wide. These underground rivers are called **aquifers** and in fact, these underground rivers provide drinking water to about one third of all Canadians and about 80% of the rural population! But sometimes we make mistakes, and those mistakes seep into the ground and contaminate our water.

This activity will allow participants to experience the difficulty to “clean” an aquifer once it has become polluted by recreating a hazardous material accident.

OBJECTIVE

Participants will investigate how pollutants contaminate ground water by using a simple model of an aquifer.

READY, SET, CLEAN

Each **group** will need:

- ◆ large cellulose household sponges
- ◆ Three 16 oz. clear glass cups
- ◆ Four plates
- ◆ tray/bucket that will catch the water squeezed from the sponge

Divide the group into four smaller groups. Each group will follow the same procedure with different pollutants and will report on how the pollutant changed the property of the water.

GROUP ONE:

Group one will use 1 ounce of liquid soap as its pollutant. In this case, the ground is contaminated when a tanker truck gets into an accident on the highway and spills the pollutant on the side of the road. The soap is a lot like real pollutants which *dissolve* in water but are not hazardous or toxic.

GROUP TWO:

Group two will use salad oil as its pollutant. Again, a truck accident has caused the spill just as Group one’s pollutant. The oil is a lot like *gasoline* which is hazardous and toxic, and does not mix well with water.

GROUP THREE

Group three will use gelatin as its pollutant. This time the pollutant has leaked into the ground from a large old and rusty underground tank where it has been stored for years. The gelatin is a lot like pesticides which dissolve in water and are toxic.

GROUP FOUR

Group four is going to have the worst of it: an explosion has occurred at a major chemical plant, and all three types of pollutants—soap, oil and gelatin, have been spilled onto the ground!

1. Your aquifer (sponge) should be pre-moistened by having someone soak it in water, and squeezing it until it is just moist to the touch. While this is happening, make sure that you have all your materials:
 - ◆ **One** large cup of clean water
 - ◆ **Two** empty large cups
 - ◆ Tray or bucket for collecting rinse water
 - ◆ One paper plate
 - ◆ **1 ounce** of your 'pollutant'
2. Place the sponge on the plate and pour the liquid 'pollutant' onto the sponge, letting the sponge soak up as much pollutant as possible.
3. **SLOWLY** pour clean water onto your sponge, letting it soak in until the sponge is full. Pour back into the cup any excess water onto the plate. You will need to know how many cupfuls of water are being used to rinse the sponge, so **keep track of all the water you use!!**
4. Lift the sponge and squeeze it out completely, catching the water in a large empty cup.
5. Pour more water on the sponge, letting it soak in.
6. Squeeze the sponge out again, this time using the other empty cup to catch the water squeezed out.
7. Compare the two cups of polluted water. Decide which cup seems to be the **most** polluted, then empty this cup. Set aside the cup that looks like it is **LESS POLLUTED**.
8. Repeat steps **5, 6, and 7** each time comparing the water in the two cups to decide whether the water is getting cleaner each time the polluted sponge is rinsed out. **Count the number of times the sponge is rinsed.**
9. Estimate to the nearest $\frac{1}{4}$ of a cup, how many cupfuls of water were used to rinse out the sponge. How much more rinsing—if any—must be done before the water squeezed from the sponge would be 'safe' to drink?

WHAT HAPPENED?

After cleaning up and putting away your materials, join together to discuss what happened between the four groups. Ask each group to report back on what happened with their sponge and pollutant.

The following questions would be helpful to ask when they are reporting:

- ◆ Could you get the water clean?
- ◆ Describe how easy or difficult it was to remove the pollutant from the sponge. Once the sponge was contaminated with only one ounce, how many ounces did it take to clean the sponge?
- ◆ **Group two**—how much oil was recovered from the sponge? Could it be measured? Will all of the oil ever come out of the sponge?
- ◆ How could you tell it was clean? If you can't see the pollutant, does that mean that it's not there?
- ◆ What reasons can you give as to why some pollutants might be easier to clean up than others?
- ◆ **Group four**—which pollutant in your mixture would clean up first, based on what the other groups found?

Further Questions for Reflection

1. Now that we understand how important water is in our everyday life, how significant is water in your Christian faith?
2. Can we take our new understanding of the importance that Indigenous peoples put on water and apply it to how we deal with water in North America?
3. Given earlier examples of water in the bible, can you see incorporating the Bible's perspective on water into your daily life?

Water Prayers & Liturgy

Recognizing the importance of water to our lives, this is a great opportunity to combine our passion of water with our passion for our faith. This is an adapted version of The Blessing of Water that was created by Bishop Mark MacDonald, the Anglican Indigenous Bishop of Canada which is used to acknowledge the sacred relationship of land and water. Please feel free to adapt as you find necessary for your youth group, and to get creative. We suggest that during the Blessing, you have the youth each pray, and pour a portion of the water into the basin/bowl.

Preparation:

- Clean surface (table, desk, floor, anything that you can create a worship space)
- Large jug full of water
- Large bowl

A BLESSING OF THE WATERS

THE GATHERING

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

And also with you.

OPENING SENTENCES

The voice of the Lord upon the waters cries out, saying, 'Come all of you, receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the fear of God, of Christ who has appeared'. Today the nature of the waters is made holy, and Jordan is parted and holds back the flow of its waters as it sees the Master washing himself.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen

The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.
Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

MARK 1:9-11

(At the conclusion of the Gospel)
The Gospel of Christ.
Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Deacon or other leader

In peace let us pray to the Lord, saying, "Lord, have mercy."

That these waters may be sanctified by the Holy Spirit, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

That there may descend upon these waters the cleansing of the Trinity, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

That God will bless them with the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan, and descent of the Holy Spirit; let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

That the Lord our God will send down the blessing of Jordan, and sanctify these waters, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

That this water may be a fountain welling forth unto life eternal, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For those who shall draw of it and take of it to sanctify their homes, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

That it may be for the purification of the souls and bodies of all those who, with faith, shall draw and partake of it, let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

BLESSING FORM

Deacon or other leader

Please respond with, "Blessed be God for ever."

We give you thanks, almighty God and Father, for by the gift of water you nourish and sustain all living things.

Blessed be God for ever.

We give you thanks that through the waters of the Red Sea, you led your people out of slavery to freedom in the promised land.

Blessed be God for ever.

We give you thanks for sending your Son Jesus, for he was baptized by John in the river Jordan. For us he was anointed as Christ by your Holy Spirit. For us he suffered the baptism of his own death and resurrection, setting us free from the bondage of sin and death, and opening to us the joy and freedom of everlasting life.

Blessed be God for ever.

We give you thanks for your Holy Spirit who teaches us and leads us into all truth, filling us with his gifts so that we might proclaim the gospel to all nations and serve you as a royal priesthood.
Blessed be God for ever.

CLOSING PRAYER (from the World Lutheran Federation)

This is a good moment to encourage silent reflection among your youth, to pray and think about the lesson, and how we can encourage change with our daily water routine. These prayers can be split up, read as a group, however you find it appropriate with your youth group.

Today the grace of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove dwelt upon the waters.
Today the Sun that never sets has dawned and the world is made radiant with the light of the Lord.
Today the Moon with its radiant beams sheds light on the world. Today the stars formed of light make the inhabited world lovely with the brightness of their splendour.
Today the clouds rain down from heaven the shower of justice for all humankind.
Today the gloomy fog of the world is cleansed by the manifestation of our God. Today all creation shines with light from on high.

Holy God, our Living Water and our merciful Guide, together with the rivers and seas, wells and springs, we bless and magnify you. You led your people by the pillar of cloud and fire through the sea, and provided them water from the rock. We thank you for the gift of water.

The Holy Spirit moved over water in the beginning of creation. In water, your Son Jesus received the gift of baptism and was anointed by the Holy Spirit to lead us into the way of everlasting life through his life, death, and resurrection.

Gracious God, you have called us into a community of faith. We are called to life by you and to sustain life with you, the source of life and creator of every being. We pray for those who struggle every day for their daily supply of water: in the slums of Brazilian cities, in the deserts of Africa, in the townships where clean water does not flow. We pray for those who experience floods and for others in desperate need of water. We pray that those who are fortunate to have an abundance of water do not take your gift for granted, or fail to heed and understand the cries of people who need water for life.

Amen.