

An Open Letter from Detroit Religious Leaders and Allies

July 28, 2014

*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters
Let the one who has no money, come... (Isaiah 55:1)*

Friends in Faith and Fellow Citizens:

In our traditions water is a free grace, part of the great gift that underlies all creation. We drink it as life itself. We wade through it to freedom. And in conversion we are immersed and sprinkled and cleansed. We wash our feet, so to pray. In season we know to honor it even by fasting from it. It is the lifeblood of the planet, circulating as river and rain. Water is the very emblem of the commons, what we hold together as one. We share it beholden to local indigenous peoples who understood, understand this deeply. For governments which serve the people, a water system is a public trust, held in trust for this generation and those to come. For the United Nations access to clean potable water is counted a human right.

In Detroit the largest basin of fresh water in the world flows by us through the river, “the strait.” But in Detroit, under emergency management, as many as 150,000 homes are threatened with shut-off, up to 3,000 per week, largely by private contractors. People, including children, the elderly and infirm, wake up in the morning to find themselves unable to drink, cook, wash, or flush toilets. In fact, two thirds of these homes are occupied by children. People without water fear losing their children to protective services. They can be driven from their homes, their neighborhood, their city.

On June 18, 2014 a complaint charging a violation of human rights was filed with the United Nations. Three Special Rapporteurs have already responded in a written statement, stressing the urgency of the situation: “Disconnection of water services because of failure to pay due to lack of means constitutes a violation of the human right to water and other international human rights.”

As religious leaders and communities we join our voices to say: In the name of humanity stop the shut-offs.

To Detroiters we say, alert, defend and protect your neighbors from shut-off. To Faith communities we say, become stations of water distribution (for information and guidance on this call 1-844-42WATER), as well as places of education, community and resistance. To Water workers, we say refuse to cut off your fellow citizens. To the Water Board, we say reverse this inhuman policy: turn their water back on. To the City Council, we say stop compounding this travesty with rate increases and other complicity. Revive and implement the Water Affordability Program. To the Governor we say: cease privatization and call off this action taken under emergency management.

To our God we pray, defend the children, the least, the poor. Help us to do so this day. Let your justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream.

Sincerely,

Rt. Rev'd Wendell N. Gibbs, Jr. Bishop, Episcopal Diocese of Michigan
Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey, Bishop of the Michigan Area of The United Methodist Church
Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, Archdiocese of Detroit
Rev. Dr. Campbell Lovett, Conference Minister, Michigan Conference United Church of Christ
Dr. Stephen Murray, President, Ecumenical Theological Seminary
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Detroit

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Rev. Bill Wylie-Kellermann, St. Peter's Episcopal
Rev. Charles Williams III, Historic King Solomon Baptist Church, National Action Network
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Rev. Paul Perez, Director of Mission and Justice Engagement, Detroit Conference United Methodist
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Fa. Thomas Lumpkin, Day House- Detroit Catholic Worker
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Rev. Matthew Bode, Detroit Lutheran Cooperative Parish
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Sisters of Mercy, West Midwest Justice Team
Pax Christi Michigan
Global Action at Mercy International Association Sisters of Mercy
Mercy International Association at the UN
Leadership Team of the Congregation of St. Joseph
Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance
Adrian Dominican Sisters

CC: Detroit City Council
Detroit Board of Water Commissioners
Homrich Wrecking, Inc
Judge Stephen Rhodes
Governor Richard Snyder