**Clean Water Needs Our Support**

Every major religious tradition holds beliefs with regard to the importance of water. These beliefs essentially boil down to just two significant principles: water purifies, and water is a primary building block of life. According to [The Water Page](http://www.africanwater.org/religion.htm), “Without water there is no life, yet water has the power to destroy as well as to create. We are at the mercy of water just as we are at the mercy of our God or gods.”

Water is necessary to sustain life, and as people of faith we believe that access to clean water is a basic human right. Clean water is needed to provide drinking water, to irrigate the crops that supply our food, and provide opportunities for recreation and connecting with nature. It is also part of a fragile web of creation—when one part is threatened, the entire web is threatened with collapse.

In a time where elected officials and policymakers are looking to cut budgets, some may think that maintaining clean and healthy rivers, streams, and ground water is too expensive and unnecessary. We contend, however, that healthy rivers and clean water are not a luxury—clean water is essential to the well-being of all of God’s people.

We believe that the federal budget process should not be used to weaken safeguards that ensure safe, clean water is available for all the life-sustaining purposes it supports. When implementation of important protections like the Clean Water Rule are delayed—as announced on January 31 by the Trump administration—and budgets for vital, foundational laws like the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act are cut, it threatens the Environmental Protection Agency’s ability to enforce standards designed to protect our water resources and public health. And, of course, the reason that enforcement is threatened is because the cuts force layoffs of dedicated scientific experts and public servants—collateral damage, but real and devastating for those affected.

Our nation’s access to clean water was at risk even before this administration took office. What we witnessed in Flint, Michigan is just the tip of the iceberg. Last year, news sources in Pennsylvania reported that at least 18 Pennsylvania cities actually have higher lead levels in their drinking water than Flint, including some of our largest cities. Anglers have long been warned not to eat fish pulled from many Pennsylvania rivers and streams because of contamination. This also means that engaging in other recreation like swimming and boating can be hazardous to our health. While threats to our water threaten everyone, the effects are often most dramatic for the most vulnerable among us, such as the communities impacted in Flint.

Sadly, early activities by this administration have only added to the threat of greater impacts. EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has already started the work of reducing transparency concerning the agency’s operations and dismantling clean water and many other vital environmental protections. Delaying implementation of the Clean Water Rule and cutting the EPA’s budget will intensify that effort and will serve only to benefit corporate polluters.

We understand that many of our elected officials and public servants like Administrator Pruitt maintain that less government is preferable. However, as people of faith, we believe that there are places where government has a vital role in protecting the health and welfare of all of God’s children. Corporations are interested in profits—keeping shareholders happy—not necessarily doing what is best for everyone. As citizens, taxpayers, and people of faith who take the concept of “loving our neighbor” to heart, we believe reducing and eliminating environmental protections and slashing budgets to enforce the protections that do exist is unacceptable. Those we elect and those appointed to serve as public servants have a responsibility to act in the interest of “we the people”—not “the rich and the few.”

Access to safe drinking water and clean rivers and streams is a prerequisite for healthy, thriving communities, where everyone can participate, prosper and reach their full, God-given potential. We call on our government to provide the requisite funding to protect, maintain, and improve our water resources, and on the EPA to act in a manner consistent with its mission of protecting our environment—God’s creation and gift to all of us.

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