

Christian Communities Call for Swift Government Action to Heal Injuries Inflicted on the People of Flint, Michigan

“But seek the welfare of the city... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Jeremiah 29:7



Christian communities nationwide are expressing grave concern for the residents of Flint, Michigan and the surrounding areas, whose water is contaminated by high levels of lead, and whose voices have gone unheard in our democracy. It has become clear that this public health catastrophe was entirely preventable. Short-sighted cost cutting measures by an unelected emergency city manager have put thousands of people, especially children, at high risk for lead poisoning. There is no safe level of lead exposure, and for children, the impacts can be both severe and irreversible.

We commit to ongoing prayer for the families as they continue to endure tragic and lifelong health impacts. We pray for the newly elected mayor's ability to craft a new direction for the city of Flint. We also resolve to respond to the moral call to rectify such horrifying injustice.

Christian communities have responded to the crisis swiftly with charitable action. The Week of Compassion ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Global United Fellowship, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Commission on Relief, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have all been working to deliver clean water to Flint residents. However, the water infrastructure remains polluted.

At every level, government must act now to manage the damage. We call on Congress and the Obama Administration to leverage federal resources to ensure the City of Flint can get new, safe water infrastructure as quickly as possible. Flint residents should receive a refund for any polluted water they paid for, and they should not continue to have to pay water bills for water they cannot use. Most importantly, we call on government at every level to support the long-term ability for children who have been poisoned to cope with the health burdens they will bear for the rest of their lives.

Furthermore, we call on the Administration to strengthen the work of the Environmental Justice Division of the Environmental Protection Agency. Government analysis of the problems associated with the Flint water crisis, as well as any government solutions, must not feign “colorblindness” or ignore socio-economic status. According to the U.S. Census, more than half of Flint's residents self-identify as Black, and forty percent of Flint's residents live below the poverty line. Nationwide, communities of color are more likely to be exposed to polluted air, land, and water than predominantly white communities. This trend reflects the failure of our democracy to protect communities from market-based decision-making processes that prioritize profit over the health and well-being of people. Every level of government must take decisive action to reverse trends of environmental racism by ensuring community members are meaningfully engaged in all environmental decisions that will impact them, including selecting their water supply.

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Green Chalice, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA

Presbyterian Church (USA)
Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.
The Episcopal Church
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
The United Church of Christ
The United Methodist Church – General Board of Church and Society
United Methodist Women
Week of Compassion of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
The Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kentucky

Creation Justice Ministries represents the creation care policies of 38 Christian communions, including Baptist conventions, mainline Protestant, Historically Black Churches, Peace Church, and Orthodox communions. Learn more at www.creationjustice.org

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Religious Leaders Speak Out on the Flint Water Tragedy

Voices from Michigan

"Flint families need immediate relief and the community needs enormous assistance to provide safe water for everyone. We do not yet know the full scope of this crisis, and cannot see when it will be over. On behalf of all people of faith, and as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I invite everyone who can get a safe drink of tap water today to help our sisters and brothers in every way they can."

- Bishop Donald Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod ELCA

"Flint needs help. But we need way more than water. We need advocates and allies who understand the devastating politics that got us to this moment -- the politics that has grabbed America by the throat. This crisis, this moment, is a direct result -- an inevitable outcome -- of policies that have been enacted over the past 35 years, a mean-spiritedness that blames poor people, immigrants and people of color for every ill, and rewards people of wealth with more wealth — including the CEOs of water multinationals who have been crystal clear in their belief that there is no universal human right to water. (They're digging the escalating sales of bottled water right now, FYI.) This is the antithesis of biblical faith. So please don't send us water. Cash is better because it empowers people here to do what is needed. However, and this is a pretty substantive 'however,' if you can only do one thing, put your elected officials on public notice that you are recommitting yourself, your energy, your resources and your vote to The Common Good. Then, do it. Preach, teach and live your faith with 'dismantling oppression' at the core. Right now, it is most evidently Flint. But vulnerable communities all over the country, all around the world, need the Church to be the Church."

- Rev. Dr. Deborah DeMars Conrad, Pastor, Woodside Church in Flint, MI

"At my request, a \$10,000 UMCOR emergency grant was released to assist the eight United Methodist congregations in Flint to start "Water Resource Centers," distributing water filters, replacement filters, water testing kits, and educational information to neighborhood residents. I am grateful for the Crossroads District's response. This is good and important work, but we know it is only an immediate, short-term response. Flint's pressing need for a new water infrastructure and the Flint children who face life-long cognitive and behavioral effects of lead poisoning require comprehensive and long-term solutions. We must deal with the systemic issues of racism and poverty that have been part of this complex issue. As United Methodists in Michigan I believe we must be part of those long-term solutions; we must be among those who are first on the scene and last to leave."

- Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey, Michigan Episcopal Area, United Methodist Church

"Flint is seen by many as poor and disposable, and is largely populated by a demographic that remains voiceless and on the margins. St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Flint, in partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan and Episcopal Relief and Development, has been and will continue to be a visible and prophetic witness for justice, especially in working in response to the lack of access to safe water in the City of Flint."

-The Rt. Rev. Todd Ousley, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Michigan

Voices of National Church Leaders

"The water crisis is appalling. We are in this era and kids are dying because of lead poisoning because the governor wanted to save money and did not take into consideration the lives of so many people. Without the means or without the income to justify authority to do it. There were people at the very outset who knew this was wrong. Our church and our 2.5 million members, as well as the other historically Black communions, strongly condemn this act by those who were in charge. We pray that they will actively, quickly solve this problem. We are praying for those kids and family members who have already been affected by such an injustice. I can't find anything worse than somebody not being able to drink a glass of water, take a bath, be able to refresh themselves after a day with something as simple as a glass of water. I am speaking for myself and many members of my denomination. This type of social injustice cannot prevail any longer and we must speak truth to power. We can no longer be afraid of that which we do not have, and all we have is family. We ought not be afraid to articulate to the world that this is unfair, and will not go away quietly."

- Senior Bishop George E. Battle, Jr, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

"The AME Church, in responding to the severe environmental crisis in Flint, is aware not only of the serious health threats but also the recently elected mayor's plan for corrective action. Not only is Vernon AME Chapel involved, but it is also the home church for the newly elected Mayor of Flint, Dr. Karen Weaver. We stand ready to advocate for accountable government that she has proposed."

- Jacqueline Dupont Walker, Director, Social Action Commission, African Methodist Episcopal Church

"From the cross, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.' Yet, in his suffering he received only a sponge of vinegar from contemptuous soldiers. For over a year the people of Flint, MI cried out 'We are thirsty!' Yet, they received only contaminated water to drink. We lament with our brothers and sisters of Flint, Michigan. We seek justice for the tens of thousands of residents who have been denied their 14th Amendment rights. We pray for the children of Flint, for worried parents, and all the residents, who, due to lack of information from the government and lack of money, had no choice but to drink toxic water. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has joined the ecumenical and interfaith community in prayer and action. Through Disciples congregations and our regional church in Michigan, and through Week of Compassion, we are partnering in emergency relief with the local community in Flint, and will continue our work for social and environmental justice for all God's children."

- Rev. Dr. Sharon E. Watkins, General Minister and President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada

"We are all the children of God. The prophet Malachi found moral clarity in that centuries ago: "Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us?" Access to safe drinking water is a human right, and as The Episcopal Church, we believe that clean water should be readily available to all people. We grieve the indefensible and tragic water disaster in Flint, Michigan, and rise up with the affected community to generate healing and reconciliation in Flint. Episcopalians have been on the ground since October of 2015 delivering drinking filters and clean water to Flint residents, and we call upon governments everywhere to join this effort. We pray that our world leaders may use their power to protect the vulnerable, and that the children of Flint may receive the resources that they need to live full and healthy lives. As our prophet Amos so wisely sang "Let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" And simple justice and human decency calls for clean drinking water for every child of God not only here in the wealthiest nation on earth but throughout the world. That is our duty to one another as children of God."

-The Most Rev. Michael B. Curry, Presiding Bishop and Primate, The Episcopal Church

"Our church policy has, for over a decade, included 'support for public policies that utilize demographic data to promote sustainable management of natural and human resources and assess risk factors associated with where people live' as well as public policies that 'require full public disclosure and involvement of all potentially affected groups in communities' ('Hazardous Waste, Race, and the Environment,' PCUSA General Assembly, 1995). We grieve that this disaster includes the lack of sustainable management, of assessment of risk factors, and of the public disclosure and involvement of affected people. We pray for those affected, are partnering on emergency relief with the local church and presbytery, and continue our work for social and environmental justice in God's world."

- The Reverend Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

"The crisis in Flint is an egregious case of environmental racism and the governor of Michigan needs to be prosecuted. The Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc. calls for swift governmental action to address this crisis and is on the ground through our state convention providing aid and assistance."

- Dr. James C. Perkins, President, Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.

The United States of America's founding documents endow all human beings with inalienable rights that guarantee them life, freedom, material conditions worthy of humankind, and the right to develop fully all potentialities of their intellect and their souls. The very word, inalienable, means these rights cannot be bought, sold, or transferred because they are given to us all by God. The Justice and Witness Ministries of The United Church of Christ boldly stand with the people of Flint Michigan who have been systemically and systematically denied these human rights, and offer ourselves as both allies and accomplices in the fight to adequately address the immediate and long term needs of a community that has been unjustly and unfaithfully treated as less than human. In collaboration with Woodside Church, the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ, and our denominational partners, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we will continue to supply bottled water and water filters to address the immediate needs of those quenched with poisoned waters as we offer our voices, our votes, and our resources to demand the political and structural reform necessary to eradicate this present source of environmental racism and ensure it never happens again.

- Rev. Dr. Traci D. Blackmon, Acting Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries for the United Church of Christ

"Because Flint is in the media spotlight, our nation and the Church are responding to Flint's immediate needs with prayer, charity, and calls for justice. It's not only the people of Flint who have long suffered from indifference. If we learn anything from this tragedy, let it be that the Church is being called into renewed community to defend all lives from forces of greed. Because of the awareness raised by what happened in Flint, I hope Christian communities will become more active in addressing environmental injustices in our own backyards."

- Shantha Ready Alonso, Executive Director, Creation Justice Ministries