



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

Caring for God's creation: Stewarding the gift of water

And God said, "Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good (Genesis 1:9,10).

We give you thanks, O God, for in the beginning your Spirit moved over the waters and by your Word you created the world, calling forth life in which you took delight.

– Evangelical Lutheran Worship, p. 230

God's gift of water makes available incredible sustainability powers to all creation.

It is essential for all life, is a critical element of the global economy and, most importantly, holds a sacred place in our relationship with God. As stewards of all creation, protecting Earth's water is not optional. Water in its various forms is meant to meet the survival needs of all of creation around the globe. Earth is composed of about 71 percent water. The oceans (saline waters) hold about 96.5 percent, and the remaining 3.5 percent is freshwater. Of the total freshwater, more than 68 percent is locked up in ice and glaciers with another 30 percent held in the ground. Typical fresh surface-water sources, such as rivers and lakes, only constitute a small fraction of all available sources. Water is continuously moving on, above and below the surface and is changing into different forms (vapor, liquid and solid). The constant motion of water from one place to another is known as the water cycle ([U.S. Geological Survey, USGS](#)).

But globally, the water situation is dire. According to the [United Nations](#):
Eighty-five percent of the world's population lives in the driest half of the planet.
Almost 2.5 billion people do not have access to adequate sanitation.
783 million people do not have access to clean water.

The United States is not immune to the lack of clean water or access to it. According to the [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's](#) National Center for Environmental Information, 2012 was one of driest years in 118 years of gathering data. Droughts put stress on our water supply and the watersheds. Nearly 1 in 10 watersheds is stressed ([University of Colorado](#)).

Water holds a sacred place in our relationship with God.

In holy baptism, the triune God delivers us from the forces of evil, puts our sinful self to death, gives us new birth, adopts us as children, and makes us members of the body of Christ, the church. Water connected to the Word – God's saving promise in Jesus Christ – is at the center of the baptismal celebration (ELW p. 225).

Water is a sign of cleansing, dying, and a new birth. It is used generously in Holy Baptism to symbolize God's power over sin and death. God can use whatever water we have. Yet, with Martin Luther, we wish to make full use of water, when it is possible. "For baptism...signified that the old self and the sinful birth of flesh and blood are to be wholly drowned by the grace of God. We should therefore do justice to its meaning and make baptism a true and complete sign of the thing it signifies (The Use of the Means of Grace, p. 32).

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All of creation depends on water for survival.



People require water for critical body functions like perspiration for cooling, transporting food in the blood stream and lubricating joints.

Water is needed for plant survival. Some plants may contain up to 85 percent water. Water is needed to transport nutrients, for cooling, and to assist with many biochemical reactions.



Water plays a crucial role in almost every aspect of the global economy.



Farms use a large amount of water. According to the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) (USDA), "Agriculture is a major user of ground and surface water in the United States, accounting for approximately 80 percent of the Nation's consumptive water use and over 90 percent in many Western States."

Energy production requires significant water. Hydropower accounts for about 7 percent of the energy produced in the U.S. and 16 percent produced internationally ([USGS](#)).



We are called to steward all of creation, which means protecting water.

We are called by God to steward all of creation, which means protection of water. We live in a world where we have reached a lifestyle of relative economic prosperity but at tremendous resource costs. Our activities affect the water quality, which affects watersheds and, thereby, our quality of life.

"Humans, in service to God, have special roles on behalf of the whole of creation.

Made in the image of God, we are called to care for the earth as God cares for the earth."

- ELCA social statement "Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice"

STEWARDING GOD'S GIFT OF WATER BY PROTECTING OUR WATERSHEDS

What is a watershed? A watershed is the total land area and water bodies that drain into a single river or lake system and is the source of groundwater recharge to that river or lake system ([USGS](#)). Watersheds are important because they determine the source of drinking water.

Why are watersheds important? Watersheds are important because they determine the source of drinking water. All lands drain into a lake, river, stream or other water body and directly affect its quality. We all live in a watershed, and the watershed's condition is important to everyone and everything that needs the water ([Environmental Protection Agency, EPA](#)).

Watersheds exist on different geographic scales, too. The Mississippi River has a huge watershed that covers all or parts of 33 states. You might live in that watershed, but at the same time you live in a watershed of a smaller, local stream or river that flows eventually into the Mississippi.



FIND YOUR WATERSHED: [Visit the EP's "Surf your Watershed" website](#) to find your watershed's name, citizen-based groups involved in watershed issues, and watershed quality data.

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How is water protected in the United States?

The Clean Water Act (CWA): The CWA was passed by Congress in 1972 to restore and maintain our nation's waters and has been instrumental in improving the quality of rivers, lakes and coastal waters.

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA): The SDWA was passed by Congress in 1974 to protect our drinking water. It sets standards for drinking water quality and for federal oversight of the states, localities and water suppliers who implement these regulations. It also requires many actions to protect drinking water and its sources: rivers, lakes, reservoirs, springs and groundwater wells.

SDWA only applies to public water systems, not private wells. For this reason it is important to make sure your home well water is safe. The EPA recommends that private well owners test annually for nitrates, total coliform bacteria, pH, and total dissolved solids. Links to more information about private wells from your state can be accessed from the [EPA](#). Information is also available from non-profit organizations that work with private well owners, such as the Water Systems Council's hotline, 888-395-1033.

Take action to protect God's gift of water at home and around the world!

Your gifts to ELCA World Hunger support projects and programs in nearly 60 countries around the world, many of which are water-related, to help our neighbors in need. When families have access to safe water they are healthier and stronger. Women and children have more time for work and school. And they earn more money and have better opportunities for the future.

Visit ELCA.org/hunger today to learn more and take action!

Additional information and resources:

- **ELCA worship resources:** download.ELCA.org/ELCA_Resource_Repository/Water_Memorial_Worship_Resources.pdf?_ga=2.92680605.1818304942.1508432596-119156230.1467996413
- **ELCA World Hunger Water Toolkit:** download.ELCA.org/ELCA_Resource_Repository/Water_Toolkit.pdf?_ga=1.14871158.1341912399.1476461047
- **Creation Justice Ministries worship resource:** CreationJustice.org/earth-day-2014---water-holy-water.html
- **National Council of Churches resource for the care of watersheds:** salsa4.salsalabs.com/o/50750/images/Water%20Stewards-1.pdf?key=81613056
- **Lutherans Restoring Creation:** LutheransRestoringCreation.org
- **U. S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) healthy watersheds overview:** EPA.gov/hwp/healthy-watersheds-overview
- **EPA water conservation resources:** EPA.gov/watersense/start-saving
- **ENERGY STAR for congregations:** energystar.gov/buildings/owners_and_managers/congregations
- **Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines for water around disaster:** CDC.gov/disasters/foodwater/
- **United Nations "Socio-Economic Aspects of Water Related Disaster Response":** UN.org/esa/sustdev/publications/flood_guidelines_sec01.pdf
- **World Bank "Natural Disasters Force 26 Million People into Poverty and Cost \$520bn in Losses Every Year":** WorldBank.org/en/news/press-release/2016/11/14/natural-disasters-force-26-million-people-into-poverty-and-cost-520bn-in-losses-every-year-new-world-bank-analysis-finds