

A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation

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## Water Stewardship

I'm not a big water-drinker, but I've been trying to change my ways and do what health and fitness professionals say you should—drink at least eight eight-ounce cups of water each day. I've been trying to do that in addition to continue drinking some of the other beverages I've always enjoyed—like my frequent cups of hot tea. Here in Pennsylvania this summer, we've had a couple periods of several weeks when we've had very little rain, and our lawns and flowers turned brown and shriveled up in the heat we've also been experiencing. So I think about water a lot, but these examples from my life are really rather trivial in the great scheme of things.

As I was soliciting articles for this edition of *Shalom!* on water—a more difficult process than I had anticipated, by the way—someone said to me, “All I know is I turn on the faucet in the morning and water comes out.” Now I know the comment was made in jest to emphasize the difficulty of rounding up articles on this subject, considering that this person is intelligent and quite aware of the world, yet it is indicative of how easy it is for many of us living in highly developed countries to take our water for granted.

The idea for an edition of *Shalom!* on water came to me when the international programs department of Mennonite Central Committee chose the issue as one of their three key initiatives for the current three-year cycle of program planning. Water is a key issue in many parts of the

world, whether it is an access issue, a safe drinking water issue, or battles over rights to existing water supplies. According to the *New York Times*, more than one billion people worldwide don't have access to safe drinking water, and 80 percent of illnesses around the world are caused by water-borne diseases. Just think of the threat of cholera that is always mentioned in the aftermath of a natural disaster like a hurricane or tsunami in developing countries.

In an article entitled “Righting Water Wrongs” in the May/June 2005 edition of *Prism* magazine (the publication of ESA, or Evangelicals for Social Action), Laura Coulter goes from noting how little of the earth's water supply is actually available as freshwater (less than three percent) to asserting, “If one nation decides to consume more than its share, nations will go without (p. 12). She names several organizations like World Vision and Lifewater International (to which I would add MCC) that provide water where there isn't enough or, more often, “help to [develop] local infrastructure and [train] locals not only how to drill their own wells but how to repair hand pumps and create a waste and sanitation system as well” (p. 14). A sidebar to this article focuses on the continent of Africa, noting that “fewer than 50 percent of the rural population has access to either water or sanitation.” In sub-Saharan Africa, “the most common cause of infant mortality is dehydration due to diarrhea, resulting from unsafe drinking water.”

Of course, water is not just an issue in Africa, the Middle East, or other developing countries—all of which are addressed in articles in this edition; it is also an issue here in North America, also addressed in other articles. Think of highly developed southern California built on the edge of a desert and using water resources from the Midwest. Think of the droughts or excessive rainfall various regions of North America experience periodically that devastate crops and wreak havoc on the economy. Think, as Coulter points out in the above-referenced article, of strip mining, loosening protections on land and wildlife, allowing various contaminants to enter the water supply, and eliminating funding for cleaning up environmental disasters that have affected water supplies. Her call to stewardship is timely and important: “Christians who live in regions of the world where water is plentiful need to be good stewards of the resources to which they have access and to take seriously the plight of those in the gravest need of usable water” (p. 12). I have heard predictions that coming wars will be fought over water rights and access to water. Let's not only be involved in bringing springs of Living Water to thirsty souls, but also in ensuring responsible use of the precious, life-giving and life-sustaining physical resource of water. 🌱

Harriet S. Bicksler, editor

# Water, Water Nowhere

By A Graybill Brubaker

## Pictures in my mind'

- It was in the village of Simaubi in what is now Zambia. The tiny infant was being bathed. The bathtub was a teacup. The mother had both of the baby's feet in one hand. With the other she was dipping her fingers into the teacup and stroking the little body. The water was dripping from the baby's head back into the teacup.
- The water pump was located on an open plain near Mpalume in Malawi. A line of more than 20 buckets were place holders for a desperate people waiting for the well pump repairmen.
- It was obviously a part of what was once a system of irrigation canals near the town of Biratnagar in Nepal. Also, it was obvious that it had not been maintained and had not held irrigation water in a very long time.
- The standpipe was there on its concrete base near Zomba in

Malawi. There were no people waiting in line and not even a path indicating that people had been using the water source. The tap had been stolen and no water was coming from the end of the pipe.

- The carefully designed and built water source for the public at Macha Mission in Zambia was a ruin. The meter was smashed, the float valve gone and the water tank was empty and very dry.

## Failed projects

1. All over the world there are relics of projects instituted to resolve water problems. Many of these were done by early missionaries, others by outside philanthropy, both governmental and non-governmental. Almost none of them has been maintained by the people for whom they were built and are totally useless, in most cases not restorable.

The missionaries of the Blantyre Mission in Malawi, founded in 1876, devised a water conduit from a source several miles away which included a remarkable tunnel. The city grew up around the mission and today is the commercial capital of the country. In 1998 the entire city was without water for three days.

When Brethren in Christ (BIC) World Missions established a mission house in the Village of Mpalume in Malawi the nearest water was about a mile away in a government supplied deep well. The missionary contracted with the headman of the village to bring water to fill two galvanized water tanks on a tower at the house. Of course, the headman sent young girls who carried the water on their heads in large, very heavy buckets.

Pieter Lootz, a South African missionary with engineering experience, built a small house next to the BIC house. He discovered a water system dating back to the colonial days. A reservoir in the nearby mountain held plenty of water for several villages

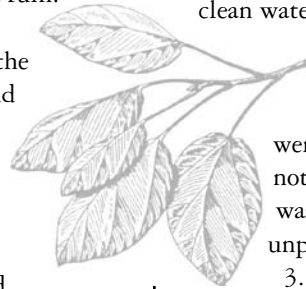
including Mpalume and Mbalula. The pipe line passed very near the BIC house. Pieter worked his heart out to get its distribution system restored. However, a favorite of the chief was allowed to build a house, cutting the pipe in spite of Pieter's objections. Fortunately the BIC house now has its own well and pump.

2. With a grant from a philanthropy in Holland a fine dam was built on Macha Mission in Zambia. With other grants a water tower and sand filter system was built to supply the hospital with clean water. A diesel pump with 100 percent back-up was built into a brick structure at the dam. The two diesel engines were stolen, the sand filter was not maintained and the dam was silted up by erosion from unprotected gardens.

3. Mindful of the desperate need for water for his school the headmaster of the Sikalongo Secondary School in Zambia set the students to work. They energetically built a dam on the nearby watershed. Inadequately designed and built, it did not survive the first real rain.

4. A most ambitious funded project in Malawi was the barrage on the Shire River. It controls the water level in the relatively small Lake Malombe and the huge Lake Malawi - the third largest lake in Africa, the seventh largest in the world. Their waters are about the only natural power source in the impoverished country. Five huge hydro-generators squeeze the energy from the water as it falls from the lake level of 1,540 feet to 325 feet before it leaves the country.

In 1998 the barrage gates needed painting. The officer in charge did not get around to doing it until April, the end of the rainy season. For the painting he opened the gates and allowed the water to flow uselessly to the sea. By the end of the dry season in October the water was so low that massive power cuts throughout the country were necessary. A year later the rains were heavier than usual. Without notifying the power ministry, the then officer in charge opened the gates and flooded the power stations, knocking out four of the five generators. It took months to get the necessary repair parts from Europe and



## SHALOM!

*Shalom! A Journal for the Practice of Reconciliation* is a quarterly publication of the Brethren in Christ Church. Its mission is to educate and stimulate Christ-like responses to the needs of society by providing biblical, theological, sociological, denominational and personal perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues.

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A village well pump.

the necessary foreign exchange was not readily available.

The answer of the developed world to these problems is to raise and send money. It is an answer as old as the modern era - about 250 years. Massive amounts of money have been poured into the so-called developing world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. During the years of colonial management the infrastructures of the involved countries were built up rapidly, gaining ground on those of the more developed countries. The fall from those levels since the loss of colonial management has been precipitous.

Grants and loans have been offered for all kinds of developments. One report has it that 80 percent of those grants returned to Europe in private accounts, that more money is owed to Africa by Europe than is owed by Africa to Europe. The scenario for doing this is detailed in one of the 37 letters that I have accumulated, mostly from Nigeria. It reads: *Within the ministry of Mining and Natural Resources where I work as Director of Project Implementation ... we have in our possession ... Fourteen Million, Five Hundred Thousand United States Dollars (US\$14,500,000) which we want to transfer abroad. ... your share of the sum will be 20% of the \$14.5 million ...*

## Solutions

There are solutions to these problems. The government of the United States is making great efforts to follow its money requiring strict accountability and sustainability.<sup>2</sup> Europe rather insists on huge amounts of money now - without the urgently necessary strings.<sup>3</sup> Such outlays simply feed corruption and the

dependency syndrome that afflicts the developing countries and stifles their creativity.

The best effort in resolving the water as well as other poverty issues around the world is the approach of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).<sup>4</sup> When the people want a well they have to dig it. Only then will MCC do for them what the people themselves cannot do - supply the well rings to keep it open. Unless the people take ownership of the project from the beginning they have no interest in maintaining it. A basic principle needs to be kept in the forefront: Unless there is accountability at the consumer end, no commodity can be sustainably supplied.

MCC speaks of appropriate technology. Teach the people how to make the things that are needed to supply water so that they can fix or replace them. True, the people cannot make a deep well pump. So the pump should be designed so that it will last. Most of the pumps that have been installed in Africa by philanthropists are the pump handle type. Where the wells are hundreds of feet deep the pump handle may well be ten feet long. The children that are sent for the water like to "dance" on the pump handle making rapid up and down strokes of little more than six inches. This tears up the cylinder leathers at the bottom of the well in almost no time. Repairs, requiring pulling the whole string of pipes, are expensive and long in coming. A more expensive pump design requires



A wheel pump in Malawi.

the turning of a big wheel. This makes a steady, full stroke in the cylinder.

Leathers in such pumps can last many years and a shot of lubricant twice per year is about all the maintenance they need.

## Conclusion

Live Aid, Live 8 and innumerable other efforts are mounted to alert the world to the plight of the poor in the developing world. The efforts need to go where the poverty is. Malawi, for example, is hopelessly overpopulated. The average uneducated woman gives birth nine times. Women with a primary school education average six. Women with a secondary education average three. Empowerment of women would lead toward the resolution of many issues, not least of which is HIV/AIDS.

Holy living would resolve all of them. Nominal Christianity does not. Sub-Saharan Africa is thought to be the most Christian of all of the continents. The HIV infection rate proves it to be the most sexually immoral, and the poverty rate, in spite of the richest of endowments, proves it to be among the most corrupt. Will resolution come only in the Millennium? Even so *Come Lord Jesus!* ☪

*Allen Graybill Brubaker is retired after many years as a missionary in various countries in Africa, a pastor, and BIC World Missions administrator. He and his wife now live at Messiah Village, Mechanicsburg, PA.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This writing totally ignores consequences. The comments will be branded as pejorative and the writer as a bigot. The advantage of having reached the end of one's career path is that the career path can no longer be damaged. Truth has become a casualty of political correctness.

<sup>2</sup> Malaria Institute at Macha and its sponsoring United States Organization, Macha Malaria Research Institute (MMRI) of Dillsburg, PA, has been granted funds for building up the very successful research unit at Macha Mission in Zambia. A significant expense falls to the MMRI to guarantee this accountability.

<sup>3</sup> See the comments of Tony Blair in *Time*, July 11, 2005, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> See the excellent article in the July 2005 edition of *Central PA* magazine, the monthly publication of Harrisburg, PA's public broadcasting system, WITF.

# Not Silver, Not Gold, But H<sub>2</sub>O

by Chuck Dawes

Whether the clear crystal pure water of the Yosemite Falls in the majestic Sierra Nevadas or Tom Sawyer's muddy Mississippi, water is a true treasure. Too often we take this treasure for granted. Just as we all should stop and smell the roses, we should all also stop and contemplate the quality of drinking water that most of us enjoy here in the U.S.

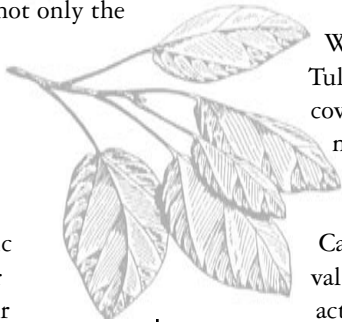
I personally feel very blessed to have been born in the great San Joaquin Valley 62 years ago. This valley has been called the salad bowl of the world. Without the availability of the surface and groundwater this would not be possible. In this area we have an abundance of both. We have not only the great watershed of the Sierra Nevada mountain range but also one of the greatest underground aquifers in the world.

Back in the late 1940s and 50s, we kids lived an idealistic life. During the long summer days we would while away our time in the pristine pools of the cold clear water created by the huge deep wells that pumped continuously during the irrigation season. When we grew weary of swimming we would often exchange for a fishing pole and fish till mom called for dinner.

Many of these deep wells pumped water from 1500 feet deep. These pumps had discharge pipes that were anywhere from 10 to 14 inches in diameter and would pump from 1500 to 3000 gallons per minute. There were literally hundreds of these wells that ran constantly during the summer months. These great aquifers are replenished each year from the percolation of the snow melt from the Sierras. It is amazing to think of the thousands of acre feet of water that still flow from these wells even to this day.

I believe that this great abundance of water was one of the main attractions of the early Brethren in Christ folks who moved into this area, many of whom came from areas of Kansas where water was not as abundant. Some of the

descendants of these early settlers still talk about how they were so impressed with the great abundance of water and the purity of the water that flowed from various artesian wells. Mrs. Gerry Solts, the daughter of Mrs. Will Eyre who emigrated from Kansas, said, "What I love most about Waukena is all you have to do is push a sharp stick into the ground and up comes drinking water." Waukena is where in about 1903 the first BIC members made their homes. This past year we celebrated our centennial at Waukena BIC Church. In this area they began to build their farms and start small dairies.



Just to the east of Waukena is the once vast Tulare Lake. At one time it covered 750 square miles making it the largest body of fresh water in the United States. Although California's great central valley is listed as arid and actually only receives about 10 inches of rain on average

we have abundant water due to the several rivers that drain from the Sierra Nevada range. Some of these mountains, including Mt. Whitney, which is the highest mountain in the contiguous United States, reach an altitude of 14,494 feet. (One note of interest is that less than 80 miles to the east of Mt. Whitney is Death Valley, which is the lowest point in North America at 286 feet below sea level. This is one of the areas where water is truly appreciated because of its scarcity.) So what we have is the Sierra Nevada range that drains mainly through several rivers. These rivers include the Kern, Tule, Kaweah, Kings, St. John, and the San Joaquin River. Most of these rivers are now dammed and strategically controlled.

Today as in the past there are many opinions to who has rights to this water. Over the years there have been numerous battles over this issue, including the infamous Mussel Slough tragedy. This was a war where farmers fought over

water rights and the result was that 11 people lost their lives. Today the war continues not with guns as in the old west but with political battles that rage every year over water rights that reach all the way to the Supreme Court. Even with all the controversy, different opinions and environmental issues, water today is very efficiently managed. Right or wrong this system appears to work. Proof that this arrangement is working is the tremendous amount of food and fiber along with dairy products that make this area the leading producer of these commodities in the world.

I think that the 49ers of the California Gold Rush would be surprised to learn that the very waters they used to pan for gold in are so valuable today. Who would have thought that we would be paying as much as a dollar for a pint of bottled water? And yet there are places in the United States such as Seibert, Colorado, and Alpaugh, California, where water is not available or too contaminated for human consumption. Sadly, in many parts of the world this great abundance of water does not exist or is underground and not available to the people because they do not have the ability to drill wells due to lack of finance. In Africa and many other areas in the world people are suffering from prolonged drought that threatens these people's survival. Many of the children in these areas spend the better part of their day looking for enough water to sustain themselves and their animals.

Here in the United States the average American family of four consumes about one acre foot of water per year. An acre foot of water is 326,000 gallons or enough water to cover one acre 12 inches deep. We in America are truly blessed. ☺

*Chuck Dawes is a retired farmer. He was born and raised in the area near Waukena, CA. He and his family attend the Waukena Brethren in Christ Church where his parents were married in 1941.*

# Occupation in the Water: Palestinians Struggle for Access Rights

by Christi Seidel, Co-Peace Development Worker in Bethlehem

*Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Exodus 3:7-10).*

The Holy Land, as we know it today, has been described throughout history as, in this passage from Exodus, a land flowing with milk and honey; a land of coveted resources, upon which many nations are dependent.

Indeed, this land was once, long ago, covered with forests and grassland. Many varieties of wildlife, such as lions, ostrich, cheetahs and crocodiles, once roamed within these hills. Over time, farming peoples cultivated the landscape in ways that changed the natural ecosystems of the historic land of Palestine. This change was sustainable with human effort, but the successive occupations and wars of this land have consistently pushed out the farming communities, leaving the soil naked and vulnerable to the elements. The land, with its strong fertility, has managed to continue to yield a variety of crops to the farming villages in Palestine.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (The Palestinian Territories) is no exception to the historical deprivation of natural resources. Today, one of the most crucial issues facing Palestinians is water access. This problem runs two risks: one for the sustainability of agriculture and human life, and a second for a just peace agreement to be reached between the two

sides of this conflict.

Palestinians have been cut off from access to the Jordan River, which runs directly along the eastern side of the West Bank territory, even though neighboring nations, such as Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, all draw from this source for their populations. Palestinians only have access to about 15 percent of their ground water reserves, leaving Israel with the other 85 percent and complete access to the Jordan River. Furthermore, 90 percent of the replenishment of aquifer basins originates in Palestine, but Palestinians have access to only 13 percent of well abstractions and 23 percent of spring emissions.\*

The Israeli Separation Barrier (the Wall), which is being constructed for security reasons around Palestinian communities, is causing more problems. The Wall has cut farmers off from their lands and will cause them to lose about 17 percent of their shares of the Western Basin, on which they depend for crop irrigation. The land continues to be torn apart as olive groves are razed and remaining forests are removed for the implementation of Israeli settlements. As more Palestinian cities, such as Bethlehem, are being "walled-in" in the name of security, the sustainability of Palestinian agricultural products in the food supply is a great concern. Palestinians are becoming increasingly dependent on Israeli products, and less self-sufficient. The Israeli Government has selectively chosen laws from previous occupiers and regimes (Jordanian, British, and Ottoman), for their own use in order to maintain complete control over Palestinian land, water, and economy.

It's not difficult to see that water resources are directly related to the political process. However, Palestinians have been cut off to water resources since 1967, and negotiations of shared water resources have been consistently pushed



A little boy, Abdullah Kanan, drinks clean water from a hose in Bethlehem.

into final-status agreements; currently, these "agreements" are unilateral at best, completely controlled and carried out by the State of Israel and keeping out Palestinians waiting in fear of finding out what they will be left with. Meanwhile, the Wall continues to cut off more farmland and wells, and more land is annexed to begin and expand settlements inside of the West Bank. Pollution of village land and water sources from the settlements is also a problem inside of the West Bank.

The Mennonite Central Committee in Palestine has been assisting West Bank farmers confronting land, crop, and irrigation issues since 1976. MCC has helped hundreds of farmers in several northern West Bank villages. In Jayyous, for example, farmers have been cut off from their lands by the Separation Wall, which has also led to the damage of thousands of meters of irrigation pipes for crops. In partnership with MCC and Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Palestinian Hydrology Group has rehabilitated a number of wells in the agricultural lands of these farmers. Specifically, the rehabilitation process included changing generators and revamping old motors, gear boxes

and pumps. The project also included the installation of new irrigation pipes, and making changes to enhance well performance, such as cleaning the well environment thoroughly. Though through this project, the wells are working more efficiently and helping farmers to maintain a little hope, it is still a daily struggle for farmers to reach their crops, as they have to pass through select gates in the Wall with permission only issued by the Israeli government.

Meanwhile, water resources become scarcer. In this arid climate, the percentage of annual rainfall that refills the groundwater basins is increasingly inadequate, due to the increasing population in the West Bank and confiscation of water access points by Israel.

In response to this need, MCC has also joined with the Applied Research Institute-Jerusalem (ARIJ) in carrying out two pioneering projects to help Palestinian farmers cope with water scarcity. First, a project that helps farmers test and preserve seed varieties well-adapted to dry-land farming conditions. Some of the resulting crops include local varieties of wheat, barley, chickpeas, lentils and vegetation for livestock. Second, a vital initiative that promotes water reuse and water harvesting. Collection of rainwater on rooftops to replenish cisterns and irrigate crops in the dry season is one example of water harvesting methods carried out by the farmers.

The occupation of the Palestinian Territories is literally sucking the life

from the land and people, while those living inside Israeli settlements in the West Bank can enjoy swimming pools and green grass. For Palestinians who don't have access to basic resources, such as water, the reality of a just peace seems as inaccessible as the Jordan River. 🌱

\*All statistics and figures taken from reports compiled by the Alternative Research Group-Jerusalem (ARIJ) [www.arj.org](http://www.arj.org), the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA) [www.passia.org](http://www.passia.org), and the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) [www.mcc.org](http://www.mcc.org)

*Christi Seidel is a peaceworker with her husband Tim with Mennonite Central Committee in Bethlehem, West Bank.*

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# You Shall Be Like a Watered Garden

By Anne L. Brubacher

In the middle of downtown Walkerton, Ontario, stands a monument that bears the words from Isaiah 58:11. "You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail." If you are unfamiliar with the "Walkerton Disaster" story, you may wonder why such a memorial had to be built and why such a strong reference to water. In many Canadian minds the words Walkerton and water go hand in hand and unfortunately for most, the connection is not a positive one.

Five years ago, in May 2000, over 2,300 people, almost 40 percent of the town's population, became ill with gastric flu when E. coli bacteria from local farm runoff contaminated the community's water supply. Seven people died and to this day, many more continue to experience medical complications that will be with them for the rest of their lives. Their quiet community was changed forever. Walkerton was no longer a quaint little town nestled along the Saugeen River but as one member of nearby Hanover Mennonite Church put it, "in Canadian minds the word 'Walkerton' was placed in the same disaster category as Three Mile

Island and Chernobyl. Our town's name suddenly took on a whole new meaning."

For the better part of a year residents drove to homes of friends and family in nearby towns so their children could have baths. They had to make sure that bottled water was always available for drinking, cooking and brushing teeth. Often they had to drive a distance to a free distribution centre to obtain it. If they showered, they had to make sure they didn't inadvertently swallow any water. Boiling water became an everyday chore. For some, it became almost a full-time job to have water available for all the household activities.

Eventually, a public inquiry was called and responsibility for the disaster was laid at the feet of the two water supply operators. However, the provincial government was also implicated because of earlier cost-cutting initiatives that involved hasty privatization of public water testing labs and because they ignored warnings that this move could put people's lives at risk.

When the boil water advisory was finally lifted after six long months, residents were left with a variety of emotions. There was obvious relief, but

along with it were feelings that went much deeper. There was blame and anger at the two employees at the centre of the problem and at a government that created the initial cut-backs. They could not easily get over the fact that their tap water had brought death and suffering to the community. There was mistrust that the water would ever be safe to drink again. To this day, many continue to drink only bottled water. Behind it all was a profound sense of betrayal that such a basic need as easy access to clean water, something they had taken for granted as a personal right, could so suddenly be taken away from them.

Through it all, the Hanover Mennonite Church walked closely with members and their families who were directly affected by the crisis. Homes were opened to those who needed a place to bath their children. Clean water was shared. Healing, both physical and emotional took time. "It was hard to forgive," says pastor Anita Janzen. "During those difficult days we held prayer vigils for the sick. We prayed that God's grace would flow over the community and help people let go of anger."

"In time people did experience God's peace," says Janzen. "Eventually, we were able to join in an ecumenical service where we were able to give thanks for clean water." It was at one of those services where the new monument, built

by a local Amish contractor in the centre of town was dedicated.

*"You shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail."*  
— Isaiah 58:11 🌿

*Anne L. Brubacher is communications and global education coordinator for Mennonite Central Committee Ontario, Kitchener, Ontario. See the information on the back page for more about MCC's resources on water issues.*

# "Thirst Is a Praise:" Writings of Wendell Berry

By Andy Saylor

I first heard of Wendell Berry in Eugene Peterson's *Take & Read*, the collection of "spiritual reading" he recommends. Peterson includes two of his books, and describes him this way:

Berry is a Kentucky farmer who also writes novels, poems, and essays. Every time he writes "farm" I substitute "parish" or "congregation." It works every time. I have learned more usable pastoral theology from this farmer than from all my academic professors.

Then I heard a story about Peterson calling a bookstore to order a quantity of Berry's novel *Jayber Crow* for all the pastors to read for a pastors' retreat he was leading. That finally did it and I picked up *Jayber Crow*. That's a person's name, the town barber in a little fictional town in Kentucky called Port William, by the Kentucky River.

I was an English literature major in college, but in recent years have read almost no fiction. That changed when I picked up Wendell Berry. I am devouring his fiction now, and regret only that the end is in sight. I have not read any of his nonfiction, but there is plenty of it.

He is wonderfully adept at creating characters. He generally confines himself to Port William, and one encounters many of the same people repeatedly. But such interesting people they are, though most do not venture far from home. They are mostly farm families, with the occasional shopkeeper, teacher, and country lawyer thrown in.

There are not many dramatic events. A couple of the town's young men do not come back from World War II. The occasional adulterous relationship. The child born out of wedlock. The

intentional fire to burn down an enemy's barn. Episodes of too much moonshine during Prohibition.

I have not seen Berry on the Christian fiction shelves, but there are regular Christian references, as for example when he writes that the woods and ridgetops were "looking as clear and clean as Resurrection Morning." Or this passage in *Jayber Crow*, where a young man named Troy is talking about the Vietnam War protestors:

"They ought to round up every one of them sons of \_\_\_\_ and put them right in front of the d\_\_\_\_ communists, and then whoever killed who, it would be all to the good."

There was a little pause after that. Nobody wanted to try to stop it...

It was hard to do, but I quit cutting hair and looked at Troy. I said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you."

Troy jerked his head up and widened his eyes at me. "Where did you get that crap?"

I said, "Jesus Christ."

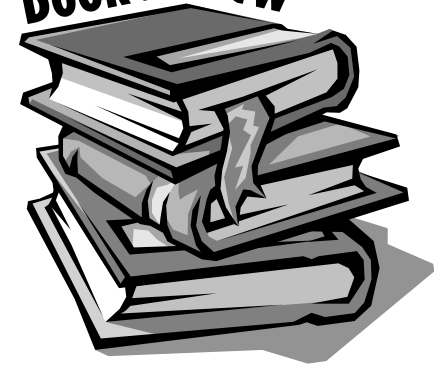
And Troy said, "Oh."

It would have been a great moment in the history of Christianity, except that I did not love Troy.

I know Berry has strong opinions about the environment and the evils of war, and one can pick those up in the novels, but he is no pamphleteer. People come first; his ability to draw characters you care about demonstrates, I think, the love he has for people.

This is the water issue of *Shalom*, and Wendell Berry's love of nature, of the land, of the water that keeps the land

## Book Review



alive, is palpable in the novels. This is again from *Jayber Crow*:

Some days, sitting here on my porch over the river, my memory seems to enclose me entirely; I wander back in my reckoning among all of my own that have lived and died until I no longer remember where I am. And then I lift my head and look about me at the river and the valley, the great unearned beauty of the place, and I feel the memoryless joy of a man just risen from the grave.

He writes with understated, unselfconscious elegance. That paragraph is an example.

He has a poem *Like the Water*, and one simply called *Water*, in which he writes that he was a born in a drought year, and so all the more:

I love the water of wells and springs  
and the taste of roofs in the water of  
cisterns.

I am a dry man whose thirst is praise  
of clouds, and whose mind is  
something of a cup.

My sweetness is to wake in the night  
after days of dry heat, hearing the rain.

If you would like to try Wendell Berry's fiction, I suggest *Jayber Crow*, the collection of short stories about Port William entitled *That Distant Land*, or his most recent novel, *Hannah Coulter*. You may find yourself transported. 🌿

*Andy Saylor is a lawyer and member of the Elizabethtown Brethren in Christ Church, Elizabethtown, PA.*



# Where Does Your Drinking Water Come From?

By Helena Cicero

"I don't know." "From the sink." "From a bottle." These are all answers I have received from school age children I have taught as an environmental educator. When they are then told that their water comes from the Delaware River, the Susquehanna River or underground, many of them are disbelieving and frankly grossed out. They do not see the connection between what they do in their backyards or on their streets to their drinking water. I often illustrate the connection by asking how many of them have dogs that they walk, and if they always scoop up their dog's poop. There are always kids who admit that, no, they often leave it behind. I then ask what they think happens when it rains. Guess what! That stuff trickles down through the ground to the groundwater, then to rivers and finally ends up in the water we want to drink. Now the kids get it; their actions affect their water! (I, of course, immediately reassure them that water goes through an extensive cleaning process before it ends up in our homes. Otherwise I would be sending home kids guaranteed to never use tap water again!) Even though I have taught many children to consider the source of their water and their connection

to it, I too am often blissfully unaware of how I am connected to water.

It is easy to demonstrate to kids how they are directly connected to the water supply. The reality is that we are also indirectly affected by contaminated water. One of the first things I cut out of my diet when I discovered I was pregnant was fish. It is one of my favorite foods, especially salmon, and it is often promoted as one of the healthiest things a person can eat. The problem? Fish is only healthy to a point. Any fisherman can tell you it is unsafe to eat large amounts of fresh-caught fish. Many lakes and rivers have signs warning of the danger of eating too many fish caught there due to pollutants in the water. As a pregnant woman I had to be concerned about the health of my baby, and fish have not only high concentrations of mercury but also POPs (Persistent Organic Pollutants) which include DDT, dioxin and industrial oils called PCBs. Fish contain high levels of these pollutants because they live in contaminated water. When you eat fish you are taking in all of these contaminants, many of which will pass through the umbilical cord. Almost all pregnancy preparation books tell mothers-to-be to cut back on fish or to stop eating them entirely.

We pay a high price for having these pollutants in our environment. Children of mothers with high levels of mercury have been found to have deficiencies in memory, learning and attention. In July 2000 the National Academy of Sciences stated that each year 60,000 children are born in the U.S. at risk for neurodevelopmental problems because of prenatal exposure to mercury. (Steingraber, Sandra, *Having Faith: An Ecologist's Journey to Motherhood*. Berkley Books, New York 2001, p.125). POPs disrupt sex hormones and create an inability to maintain pregnancy. It was quite frightening for me to read that the little city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania where I live was listed as having one of the five highest levels of dioxin in the United States! (p. 258). I was faced with the reality that I was being affected by the pollution of our environment and if I did not protect myself I could be adversely affecting my child.

I began to feel connected with mothers all over the world. I had knowledge of

pollution in my environment and the choice and ability to monitor what I ate. Other mothers may not have access to this type of information or lack choices about the food they eat. A mother-to-be living in a fishing village in Japan or up in the Arctic Circle may not have access to any foods other than fish, so even if she knew that eating fish could harm her child, she might have no other option. It is unjust that this type of pollution is able to travel all over the globe. The people most affected by contaminated water are almost always not the ones polluting it.

All of this information makes me consider my own actions. I think of myself as an environmentalist, one who enjoys the outdoors and is concerned about its protection. I also consider stewardship of the environment to be an important part of my faith. Being aware of this problem, I had to consider what I could do. I was then reminded that I always teach children that their actions at home are important, and each person making life changes will cumulatively make a difference. I remembered that when there had been a drought in my area, I rarely cut back on the number or length of my showers. I had not participated in a neighborhood clean-up even though the sewer drains on my street are often filled with trash and lead directly to the Susquehanna River.

Taking care of our water is a worldwide responsibility. Pollution here in the United States affects us, but it also affects people all over the globe. We need to begin in our own neighborhoods, but we also must concern ourselves with the health of the water of the world. Our corporations and government need to be working to prevent the pollution of water both at home and worldwide.

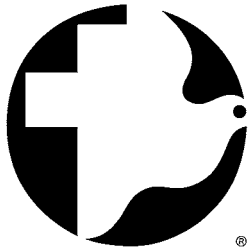
My father-in-law is a fisherman and he is quite excited to teach my son, Jack, how to fish. I envision them on a dock, side-by-side, in matching hats hanging with lures, casting their lines into the water. I would love for my son to learn a connection to his world by eating the fish he has caught. I do not want him to have to throw every fish back because it would be too dangerous for him to consume. As a Christian, a mother, and a member of the world community, I

feel a need to make a conscious choice to connect myself with my world. I need to be aware of how my life and decisions can affect the rivers, lakes, ocean, forests and people all around the globe. This takes time for education and a willingness to change parts of my life, but I think

it is well worth it, especially when I consider the world I want my children, grandchildren and so on to live in. 🍀

*Among other things, Helena Cicero is a part-time environmental educator at the Oakes Museum at Messiah College and a mother.*

*She is an active member of the Harrisburg BIC church and lives in Harrisburg with her husband Patrick, who was supposed to write this column but passed it off because he knows nothing about water, and their infant son, Jack.*



## Mennonite Central Committee

*Editor's note: The following three short pieces illustrate MCC's work around the world on water issues. They were either published as news releases or in MCC's magazine, a Common Place.*

### Nicaraguan Brethren in Christ bring water to their village

By Tim Shenk

INÉS, Nicaragua — Water is scarce in this farming village of 480 people, nestled in a bowl-shaped valley that turns a dusty brown during the six-month dry season.

Until recently, Maria Bernarda Lopez Ruiz spent two to three hours each day filling and carrying eight buckets from her neighbors' water taps because she did not have one of her own. "The houses where the people had good hearts, I would always ask," she says.

Lopez has been a widow for 10 years, she says, and has six children — four of them still at home. She is a longtime member of the village's Brethren in Christ Church, and in April her pastor led a community project to expand the village's basic waterworks. Now the Lopez family and 13 other households enjoy new water taps of their own.

The pastor, Carlos Jaime, organized the project with support from the Social Commission of the Brethren in Christ Church of Nicaragua, which is funded by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Like other development work that the Social Commission supports, the Santa Inés project directly benefits both Brethren in Christ Church members and other community members.

Jaime says that Santa Inés struggles economically because of the long dry

season and because nearly all the villagers farm on rented land. From December to May, when not a drop of rain falls on Santa Inés, the men of the community leave for weeks or months at a time to pick coffee in Costa Rica, clear land on other distant farms or work in the capital city, Managua. And at harvest time, Jaime says, the landlords collect as much as half of what the villagers produce.

"We grow corn, beans and wheat," he says. "A few people have a pig or two or chickens. None of us has cattle, because we're surrounded by (land owned by) rich landowners. ... So we're working to make them richer."

The steep, deforested mountainsides surrounding Santa Inés are also owned by wealthier farmers or ranchers, which has

limited the village's access to water. The village owns a single spring in a small, forested patch of the mountains and pipes the water several miles downhill. Because the spring supplies the village with only two hours of water a day during the dry season, Jaime has also hired several engineers to try to improve the flow.

"They said, 'You've got to clean around the water source, and if that doesn't work, you've got to look for other sources of water to supplement this one,'" Jaime says. "The problem is that a lot of those other sources of water are on the land owned by the rich landowners."

*Tim Shenk is a writer for Mennonite Central Committee, Akron, PA.*

### Cisterns prepare families for the dry season in northeastern Brazil

By Tim Shenk

CACIMBINHA, Paraíba, Brazil — During the dry season, Luis Faria Cavalcante used to dig shallow wells in a dusty riverbed on his farm in order to have drinking water.

"When the wells would dry out, we would look for water a long way away," says Cavalcante, 78, a farmer in the arid

interior of Paraíba, a state in northeastern Brazil. But two years ago Cavalcante and his wife Luiza Maria Monteiro built a cistern with materials supplied by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

Now the 16,000-liter cistern stores the rainwater they collect from their roof during the few precious rainy



The family of Maria Ana da Conceicao and her granddaughter Anna Carla Amorim built a cistern with materials from MCC. In Brazil's arid northeastern interior, cisterns store clean rainwater to last through a long dry season. (Photo by Matt Lester)

months each winter. For Cavalcante and Monteiro, it is enough clean drinking water to last the eight months a year in which hardly a drop falls from the sky.

For the past 26 years, MCC has helped residents of Brazil's arid northeastern interior build cisterns. The effort has gained a new urgency as the Brazilian government and charitable organizations have joined in an ambitious project to build one million cisterns in five years.

Betty Szilassy, an MCC worker, has 20 years of experience building cisterns in northeastern Brazil and is currently a

regional coordinator for the One Million Cisterns Project.

A cistern saves someone in each family the many hours of work it takes to haul water each week, Szilassy says. Cisterns also replace contaminated water holes, reducing water-borne diseases.

MCC helps build cisterns as part of the One Million Cisterns Project and through its own rotating loan fund.

Maria Ana da Conceição, the mother and grandmother of a household of six, received the materials for a cistern from MCC in December.

"Before the cistern we would have to walk and get water every day or every other day," she says. "We suffered a lot here."

With the help of neighbors her family dug a hole and poured six rings of concrete, capping it to form a large cylinder. After several rains, it contains about 3,500 liters of clean water with room for much more —replacing hundreds of trips to the water hole.

"I didn't pay anybody," Da Conceição says. "My son Ronaldo went and helped some other people too, and they came and helped me."

*Tim Shenk is a writer/editor for MCC Communications.*

## Once in 10 years it'll rain like it rained last year

By Jose Cicero

Last year we had good rain and then we got a cistern. Both of them are beautiful things. Before that, it had gone five years without much rain, and we almost died of thirst. People who had 30 animals had 15 after the drought. People who had 20 only had 10 left.

When we had to, we used to get water five kilometers (about three miles) away at the base of a mountain. It's up on the border of the next state. There's a windmill there on somebody's farm. The farmer was really good. He allowed us to get water during that harsh drought.

We used a donkey cart to haul water. By the time we got back with the donkey, all the animals were thirsty

again, so we had to go back and get more. We stored water in water holes, but these would only hold water for about six months.

We grow corn, beans, squash and watermelons. It's all for the family. Plant it to sell? There's really no market for that. I've got goats, a cow, chickens and ducks. We grow fields of palma cactus, which survives the drought. It's food for cattle and goats, so they can survive.

I helped others, and they helped me build this cistern. Every day we'd go to somebody's house, and little by little we built them. There are now 15 cisterns in this area.

I was born here and raised here, in

the next farmhouse down the road. I don't think I ever went even one month to school — I was always working. I took a trip to look for work in São Paulo when I was 20 years old. I worked in construction, tying together steel bars to build concrete columns. I spent a year and two months there.

There were many people who were moving to the cities then. Five people from my family went to São Paulo. At that time, they could find work and take care of themselves. Today, an illiterate person couldn't get work. To buy and sell stuff, you have to know how to read.

My wife Maria das Neves Lima and I met at a forro (folk) dance. Always the forro dances are with an accordion, a big drum and a triangle. In November 1979 we got married. We were both 24 years old.

I used to enjoy hunting, usually for birds. Five years ago, when we got electricity, we started watching TV. I stopped hunting, because I thought it was better to preserve nature. To eat, I think it's alright to hunt, but I don't go hunting for the sake of hunting anymore. I catch birds I keep as pets in open-air cages, and once I found and raised a mountain lion.

I go to Mass in Jataúba (a nearby town). We wish we could go more, but I don't have a car. I've got a bike, but it's kind of hard to take my wife on a bike. Sometimes I think church on TV is about the same thing. It's a little better when you're there in person — you meet your friends.

I don't think any of my four older kids are going to come back to the farm. Most of them are living in Santa Cruz city, and they're all working in sewing factories. The cistern is going to make life a lot easier. We just need a little bit more rain to fill it up. If every year was like this last one, there wouldn't be a better place in the world. I've got everything in abundance —beans, corn, squash, watermelon. 🍉

*Jose Cicero de Paiva lives with his wife and youngest daughter near Jataúba, Pernambuco state, in Brazil's northeastern interior. MCC helped him build a cistern.*

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## The path toward healing from depression

For 20 years, I have been reading *Shalom!* I have greatly valued the Brethren in Christ publication and have appreciated its commitment to wholeness and completeness within the community of Christ. Thank you that many of the writings have expressed opposing viewpoints, to which many believers hold firmly, allowing dialogue on many topics.

The Health and Wellness issue of *Shalom!*, dated Spring 2005, allowed me to become aware of the controversy surrounding clinical depression. Having suffered from a major depressive episode, formerly referred to as a nervous breakdown, I could relate to "Surviving Clinical Depression," written by Ray L. Bailey. My episode was totally unexpected, and like Bailey, I find myself still healing, and "the consequences of having a serious depression" have created many new issues.

"A Christian Counselor's Perspective on Depression" by Dixie Yoder reminded me that misunderstandings about depression abound in our society. After my personal experience with clinical depression, I found myself reacting to Ms. Yoder's writing. Is there proof that "the predominant root of depression has a *spiritual* first cause, not a physical one?" Where is that proof? Are we to believe that we are completely responsible for the thought patterns that swirl in our agitated minds? In order to really obtain the decisive "solution to the anxiety and depression produced by life in a sinful world," are we forbidden from using channels other than prayer and Scriptures, knowing that God is the provider of all good things? Will the stigma surrounding anxiety and depression ever leave the church? With recent dialogue in secular society regarding postpartum depression and people's *opinions* regarding the use of medication, will depressed individuals continue to be labeled as *weak* for using medication? Will our judgmental opinions cause people to continue to hide their painful depression? How long will we as Christians judge those whose journeys are unknown to us rather than minister to them in genuine love? Is medication really a quick fix, or is it a tool

to help in a time of trouble?

Here is my story: I grew up in a home with a father who had a mental illness. This illness caused more pain to his family than can be imagined. My father was physically abusive and had fits of rage, and while no one knew when he would strike, one always felt the need to be prepared. Following the abusive episodes, my father would act as though nothing had ever happened. As in the home of an alcoholic, we lived as if there were an elephant in the room about which no one could talk.

I prayed for my father to be transformed and for the traumas to end, yet life continued to be difficult. When my father left the home, financial difficulties brought on new struggles. As I wrestled with God, sharing my anger and hurt, I know that he cared me, and I clung to the hope that he cares for his own.

My husband Mark and I recently celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary. We now have five children, ages 4 to 13. Before having children, I never realized how powerful the events of the past would continue to be. As our children grew, I found myself to be consumed with worry. When our oldest was seven years old, I ended up in the hospital with what was determined to be a panic attack. Anxiety and panic continued to recur, and depression set in.

When I contacted my therapist for the first time, he assured me that what I was experiencing was typical for adults who had experienced difficult childhoods. He assured me that I could gain the needed tools in order to deal with the painful past as I lived in the present.

At some point I began to question how my father could ever have left us, and knowing that he did not care whether we lived or died made my thoughts more painful. As I shared these thoughts with my counselor, he tried to convince me to begin taking medications. My fears of possible side effects from the medication, and my desire to heal without medication, kept me from taking anti-depressants. When strong doubts entered my mind of whether or not God existed and whether or not Jesus was really and truly alive, I became terrified. How could I have reached a point where I considered throwing away

my faith? So terrifying was my fear that I decided to begin taking anti-depressants. My counselor worked with me during the three weeks it took for the medication to take effect, and he often reminds me that once the past is faced, the memories won't cause the pain they once did.

After nearly three years, I am still taking anti-depressants. Studies have shown that medication and psychotherapy, when used in combination, allow the client to heal more quickly than either medication or therapy alone. The combination also allows an individual to continue to function in life. Lying on the couch, avoiding the inner and outer turmoil in a day, is not functioning. As a mother of five young children who have many needs, I had to get back on my feet quickly. I would encourage anyone who is struggling with the decision to take medication for depression to take it while continuing therapy.

When I have shared with others that I am battling depression and am on medication, I have been amazed at how many people in the church have shared with me their personal experiences with anxiety and depression and medications. We are free and often eager to share other physical burdens, such as cancer or heart trouble or an upcoming surgery, with those in the church, but we fear sharing our inner, personal struggles. We as the body of Christ need to feel free to share our emotional trials with others as well, without the fear of being judged. My counselor is confident that talking about one's struggles with depression will aid in the healing process and allow others to open up and heal as well.

Philip Yancey's book, *What's So Amazing about Grace?*, has really helped me to move toward healing and forgiveness. As I have moved forward in this process, feelings of hate and anger toward my father are being replaced with pity, compassion and concern, and I am thankful that God is a just and merciful God. I pray that God will not judge me harshly for taking anti-anxiety and antidepressant medications on the path toward healing from depression.

Melissa Rorabaugh Heise  
*Condensed from a longer letter/story.*

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## Water Resources

*And God said, Let the water 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).*

Today's water as part of God's creation: When water is clean and plentiful, people often drink, irrigate their crops and wash their clothes and bodies without much thought. In places where water is scarce, people — usually women and children — must walk long distances to fetch it. God provides the basics of life, including water, but often too many people find them hard to come by.

Overall, 1.1 billion people around the world lack access to adequate drinking water and 2.9 billion people lack access to proper sanitation. A person living in North America uses about 450 liters of water each day, while the average person living in the developing world gets by on about 10 liters a day. To put this into perspective, one flush of a toilet uses as much water as the average person in the developing world uses for a whole day's washing, cleaning, cooking and drinking.

The story of Walkerton, Ontario (see page 6) gives us reason to pause and consider God's great gift of water and how we all too often take it for granted or misuse it. For years, Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) has been involved in water projects in the developing world, helping people build cisterns, water pumps, small dams and wells. MCC has also developed resources that can be used to build North American awareness about the need to care for this gift.

### MCC WaterWorks Toolkit

Across the globe, one in six people do not have access to clean water. This toolkit is for churches, schools and other groups who want to learn about water and MCC water projects around the world. The kit includes a four-session adult curriculum, children's activities, a DVD, a poster, stickers, a WaterWorks Giving Calendar and more.

### MCC Water Table

This is a fun intergenerational activity that encourages participants to become engaged in making connections between

their own personal use of water and the water needs of their global neighbours. It can be used as a fund-raiser for MCC Water Projects around the world.

A table is set up with empty plastic water bottles and response cards set out in front of each bottle. Participants donate two dollars and are given 20 dimes in return. They must distribute the dimes around the table according to the instructions on the response card.

For example: an average household uses 7.6 litres of water each day for brushing teeth; give three dimes if you leave the water running while you brush your teeth. Or, in Ontario, our water comes from various sources such as lakes, rivers and underground aquifers; give a dime if you know the source of your community's water. 🌱

*A detailed description of the MCC Water Table is available in pdf format at [www.Mcc.org/ontario/resources](http://www.Mcc.org/ontario/resources). MCC WaterWorks Toolkit. Call your nearest MCC office to borrow a copy of this detailed resource for adults and children. In the U.S. call 1-888-563-4676. In Canada call 1-800-313-6226.*