



A Human Future

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Since 2006, Luke Stocking has worked with Development and Peace (D&P), the international development agency of the Canadian Catholic Church. His first involvement in D&P was at 16, in a campaign to end sweatshop labour. Most of Luke's work is with Canadian Catholics. However, he has led trips for volunteer members to visit D&P partners in Zambia, the Philippines and Paraguay. Luke has an MA in Theology from the University of Toronto (St Michaels'). He is happily married and has two children.

Water—What Does It Mean to Us?

An Interview with Luke Stocking

In this issue we asked Luke Stocking to speak about his educational work on bottled water as a leader in Development and Peace, the arm of Canadian Catholic Church that focuses particularly on Catholic Social Teaching and social justice work. It was not our intention in choosing this topic that it correspond to the season of personal reflection and spiritual preparation that is Advent in the Christian calendar, but perhaps it will inspire such reflection.

— Beth Porter, ed.

Beth Porter: Development and Peace has run major campaigns on the issue of bottled water twice over the past few years. Your work included Catholic schools. Why this issue, and what do you hope youth will understand?

Luke Stocking: We try to underscore that water is not a private good but is a common good meant for everybody and essential to survival. To convey this message in Canada, we chose bottled water because it is a symbol of the privatization of water that people can connect to. Bottled water is, at its essence, the taking of God's gift to everybody and turning it into a private good. We're a national organization so we work with schools, churches, communities, right across Canada. My focus for the water campaign was on central Ontario. The action was to encourage people to create bottled water free zones.

Of course, we weren't creating this movement ourselves. The bottled water issue has currency in wider society, and

public schools and by other groups have also raised awareness. Our campaigns were a way to contribute to that movement.

There was a point when suddenly, probably in the 90s, bottled water became trendy. Everywhere, people had their little bottles of water, and they started buying water for home use.

Yes, they became worried about tap water, even though public utilities are more regularly inspected than bottled water companies. The Polaris Institute produced some fact sheets which are on our Just Youth website. One is on social trends and bottled water. It talks about the advertising and spin corporations have created. Another is on the environmental impact.

As part of your campaign some students constructed pirate ships from plastic water bottles abandoned in their schools. Why the pirate theme?

It was a fun way to connect with the kids. The idea came from students in one of the schools—Pope John Paul II, in

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Scarborough—who called themselves “eco-pirates,” or “Pirates of the Water Commodification Resistance.”

On Bottled Water Free Day in March we had a big rally at the offices of the Toronto Catholic Board. Schools brought their ships, the students dressed as pirates, we “sailed” the ships through the building, and Board officials spoke. Then the student trustee that year, Natalie Rizzo, working with other trustees, produced the political will on the Board to turn the whole TCDSB into a bottled water free zone. Of course, we broke down the ships and sent all to recycling, but the students understand that recycling is not a satisfactory solution. In fact, only about half of all water bottles are recycled, and the recycled plastic from water bottles is used to make cheap non-recyclable products.

Are there other aspects to your campaign?

We also call attention to bottled water as an international development issue because in many countries the only way to get clean water is to purchase bottled water. Water is privatized. This problem arises when

the country loses control of its water. Sometimes this happens through international trade agreements or when countries are in debt. Greedy multinationals and corrupt officials can add to the problem. Sometimes it

Water is not a private good but a common good... God's gift for everybody.

is the result of lack of political will or economic will to undertake the development necessary to have systems that can deliver clean and safe water to people through a public utility. Some of our partners, groups we support throughout the world, such as KRuHA—a network of grassroots organizations in

Indonesia, are working on access to water and the need for public water utilities. Our staff saw what can happen when they visited a rural community in Indonesia that had lost access to the local spring because a bottled water company had taken control of the spring and was using it to bottle water to sell in the larger cities of the country. We cannot put water, especially drinking water, completely in the hands of the market.

Natalie Rizzo – “Bottled Water Free”

Natalie writes of her work leading to the bottled water-free initiative at the Toronto Catholic District School Board, the largest Catholic school board in Canada:

I was deeply passionate about the fact that water is a human right and not a commodity to be bought and sold for profit in our schools. I thought it particularly important that as a student trustee, I bring such a vital social justice issue with a tangible solution to the school board table. In my academic pursuits now at university I continue to invest my time in the study of international development, where water is a cross-cutting component that impacts other aspects of human development.

Natalie Rizzo is double majoring in African Studies and Political Science at the University of Toronto.



“Pirates of the Water Commodification Resistance,” from Blessed Cardinal Newman Catholic High School



When you say ‘not completely’, are you prepared for some market involvement?

From the Catholic Church’s perspective the fundamental principle is that delivery systems for getting drinking water to people must serve the common good. So it is theoretically open to some participation of the private sector. However, whenever there has been significant privatization of water resources, the poor especially have never benefitted. Of course special situations exist where bottled water or tanked-in water is the only way to get safe drinking water. The question is, from a development perspective, ‘Is that good enough?’ At Development and Peace we are never against bottled water in all circumstances. The problem is when it becomes accepted as a system by which people will regularly get their drinking water for the long term.

This is hard work. What keeps you going?

I believe this is a calling, what God wants. Access to water is a spiritual issue. John Paul II said that some resources are so integral to human flourishing that

they transcend market forces. In its representation to the Kyoto World Water Forum the Vatican quoted his teaching and pointed out that water falls into that realm. It follows that whatever systems we have for getting drinking water into people’s hands must serve the common good.

What do you hope for from our readers?

In a world where, according to the United Nations, at least 884 million people lack access to clean water—this is the number used by the United Nations when it declared access to water a human right—and 1.5 million children under the age of five die each year from waterborne-related diseases, we live in a country with the cleanest water in the world. I hope that they will take a moment to ask themselves, ‘What does water mean to me? And what is my attitude to bottled water?’ If drinking water is no different than Coke or apple juice or whatever, then by all means, let’s clap the bottled water industry on the shoulders for coming up with a brilliant idea to make tons and tons of money by selling us something that we can get practically for

Water as a Commodity

Water, in most traditional world views, is part of the commons. It is not considered a right but a necessity—a free gift. Even in areas of chronic water scarcity or political conflict there are long traditions of generosity and water hospitality. But now water is a commodity. It is a “good,” an investment, or a service....

Everywhere in the world, public services are encouraged to become private. Waste management is the entry point for many corporations. When municipalities, where water is usually controlled, cannot provide the needed services, they sell waste management facilities. It is a small move to then buy the water treatment plants, and then the access to water itself. Privatizing the water systems is the first step toward privatizing the water sources. In most countries, waste and potable water systems are not separate. (Germany is an exception.) When potable water is privately owned, then the access to water is controlled. This means that the water sources are owned.



Heather Eaton, Ph.D., Professor, Conflict Studies, Saint Paul University, Ottawa. (from “Reflections on Water: Ecological, Political, Economic, and Theological,” a paper commissioned by Kairos after a one-year study, 2009.)



free. But if it is for all people, I hope they will ask, ‘Who are the people who do not have the same kind of access to water that I have? And how can I help them?’

Acts of solidarity make a difference. Some people may scoff. It’s true, just taking a shorter shower doesn’t save a child dying of a waterborne disease. But it puts less stress on the local public water utility. And if everybody is doing that, it’s practical, and it also creates a reflection on values around water. Then those values can begin to be translated into our hopes and dreams and work through organizations like Development and Peace, so that others may have that same kind of access. It can lead to getting involved with an organization doing this kind of work or financially supporting its initiatives in parts of the world that lack of access to water. ■

For Your Information

- Development and Peace
- Polaris Institute on water
- Just Youth (D&P campaign)
- St. FX student initiative in N.S.
- Council of Canadians on “spin”
- *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World’s Water*, by Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke (2003)
- Development and Peace International Programs
- Indonesia: KRuHA (The Peoples Coalition for the Right to Water) is working to change a law passed in Indonesia in 2005 that favours privatisation of water. D&P in Indonesia.
- The Water Project – a U.S. site educating about bottled water and raising funds for building wells in Africa

The Solidarity Principle

Solidarity is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.

Joseph Donders, John Paul II: *The Encyclicals in Everyday Language*

Read more about Catholic Social Teaching.

On Trade Agreements

This CBC Nov 28/12 broadcast and article reminds us that trade agreements can put our water resources at risk. Canada is currently in the midst of several such negotiations. We should likewise be concerned that Canadian companies not be able to take advantage of poorer countries through procurement agreements regarding water and wastewater services.

First Nations Concerns

- Council of Canadians submission to the UN
- Lack of water on Manitoba reserve
- Lack of trained people to maintain and check wells in Yukon
- From Chapter 8 “Water for All” by Michael Goldman, in *Environmental Governance: Power and Knowledge in the Local-Global World*, eds. Gabriella Kutting and Ronnie Lipschutz. “[The] trend towards solving the problem of water scarcity with water privatization reflects a major shift in the global development industry.” Read excerpt.
- Canadian Bottled Water Association (corporations that produce and market bottled water)

www.larche.ca/en/inspiration



The L’Arche movement was founded by Jean Vanier, in France in 1964. Today there are 137 communities of L’Arche on six continents, 29 in Canada. In L’Arche, people with intellectual disabilities and those who come to assist them share life together.

A Human Future is offered as a contribution to the Canadian conversation about values and the fostering of a society where everyone belongs and can make a contribution.