

All around the world, people are experiencing a water crisis. More than a quarter of the people use water that contains feces. In the United States, water-quality violations have gone up with forgotten water systems not being properly cared for. And in California, the current drought is the driest recorded period in the past 100 years. As climate change reduces access to water and communities are forgotten, the water crisis has become more severe and more important than ever as an issue to address.

One of the stories in “Americans Without Water” was about a community that would have clean water if the pipe was only  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile longer. Instead, they were given the polluted water from after use in the agriculture fields and farms. This should not be allowed. Within the Laudatory Si, “fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life”. The key word is fresh, rather than polluted water which can increase risks of diseases and death. This story is what Laudatory Si warns against as we have “a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity”. Fresh drinking water must be given to all as they deserve dignity and they should have a right to the items necessary for survival. Those of us who do have access to clean water are responsible for creating that availability for others. Thus, both the Catholic Social Teachings of Human Dignity and the Rights and Responsibilities apply to this water crisis. People should not have to plead for clean water or find the one spout available to get water, but should have the same access as everyone else.

At a state level, California’s responsibility is to prepare for the environmental conditions it faces to make sure its citizens still have access, but at an international level, we must focus on making sure everyone has access to clean water. California continues to experience severe droughts and wildfires, depleting necessary water supplies. As the California Conference of Catholic Bishops note, “tens of thousands of rural Californians are unable to drink water from their taps”. By making sure that the water systems are up to date and finding more solutions to conserve water, it would be possible to change this unfortunate fact. But it is our responsibility, those of us who do have access, to make this happen and give others the respect and dignity they deserve. His Holiness Pope Francis defined ‘leaving no one behind’ as, “being aware of the need to respond with concrete actions; not only with the maintenance or improvement of water facilities, but also by investing in the future, educating new generations in the use and care of water”. We are the ones who have the power to create that change and leave no one behind, so it is our responsibility to make sure that no one’s rights are taken away and that

access to water can improve and continue to improve during this generation and the next.

But all this change has to start with one person to unite the cause and create the change needed. The first step is easy enough- be aware of the issue. Learning about the water crisis and how people do not have access to the water they need is an important step in understanding why it is our responsibility to protect others rights. The next step is to take action and spread awareness. This could be from conserving water to writing letters to local and national governments to peaceful protests in order to gain attention. Whatever it might be, actually acting upon the issue shows that you care and this is important to you. One person may not be able to create large change, but as more are aware and the organization grows, the impact will increase too. This is clearly an important issue as it surrounds people's health with unclean water causing sickness and reducing lifespans. Everyone should have access to safe water, but it's currently not a guarantee. Instead, access to clean or dirty water can be a way to reduce one's dignity and push people off to the side. It is our responsibility to allow everyone dignity and respect with access to safe water.