

Proposal to Loretto Assembly 2006

SAY NO TO BOTTLED WATER!

Background

In Christian and other faith traditions water plays a central role. It is a gift and has a unique life-giving role in creation. "Water by its very nature cannot be treated as a mere commodity among other commodities. Catholic social thought has always stressed that the defense and preservation of certain common goods such as the natural and human environments cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces, since they touch on fundamental human needs which escape market logic." (cf. Centesimus Annus,40)

Each person has a right to water for a basic livelihood yet it is the most vulnerable and voiceless in society who are the first to suffer from irresponsible pumping of aquifers and fresh water lakes. It is projected that 50% of the world's population will face water scarcity by 2025.

Access to safe, clean and affordable water for personal and domestic use is a basic human right. Water should be held in the public domain for the common good of all people and for the good of the commons keeping in mind the rights of other threatened species and of whole ecosystems.

Corporations have spent millions of dollars to convince us that bottled water is cleaner, healthier, safer and more pure than tap water and they are succeeding. People are willing to spend more money per gallon on water than on gasoline. Yet, according to an article in The New York Times, 40% of bottled water actually comes from municipal tap water.

Effective marketing of bottled water by major beverage corporations within the United States has in just five years almost doubled the consumption of bottled water from 4.7 billion gallons in 2000 to an estimated 7.3 billion gallons in 2005. Similar worldwide growth in this industry has serious consequences for our planet and for those most impoverished and in need of clean water and sanitation. Half of the \$100 billion that consumers spend every year on bottled water could provide worldwide access to clean water.

In addition to depleting fresh water resources for commercial gain, this phenomenon has also contributed to landfill problems. It is estimated that only a small percentage of plastic water bottles are recycled thus adding significantly to the already existing problem of landfills.

As water scarcity is fast becoming one of the world's most pressing global challenges, can we within the Loretto Community act in opposition to the present bottled water culture created by marketing hype? Can we make our homes and our Loretto institutions "commercially-bottled water free zones?"

Creative solutions are appearing. For example Louisville, Kentucky's water utility has given away empty reusable sports bottles for eight years with the message: "If you want really great bottled water in our community, all you need is the bottle."

Because we, the coordinating committee of the Loretto Earth Network, believe that Loretto has a role to play in protecting the water of the planet from corporate control, we submit to you the following proposal:

For the common good of the people of the world, other species, and the natural systems of the planet, the Loretto Earth Network proposes the following:

Motivated by a deep concern about the expanding commercialization and commodification of the fresh water supply of the planet, we, the Loretto Community gathered in Assembly, pledge, under normal circumstances, to refrain from the purchase of bottled water both as individuals and at our Loretto owned institutions.

We further pledge to assist in the promotion of this initiative to refrain from the purchase of commercially-bottled water through those channels open to the Loretto Community within Loretto sponsored institutions. The members of the Loretto Earth Network promise to be available, as needed, for further conversation and education on this issue in school settings, at spirituality centers and at Loretto-sponsored conferences so that little-by-little Loretto-sponsored institution can become commercially-bottled water free zones.

