

Christian Communities Call for Swift Government Action to Heal Injuries Inflicted on the People of Flint, Michigan

“But seek the welfare of the city... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” Jeremiah 29:7

Christian communities nationwide are expressing grave concern for the residents of Flint, Michigan and the surrounding areas, whose water is contaminated by high levels of lead, and whose voices have gone unheard in our democracy. It has become clear that this public health catastrophe was entirely preventable. Short-sighted cost cutting measures by an unelected emergency city manager have put thousands of people, especially children, at high risk for lead poisoning. There is no safe level of lead exposure, and for children, the impacts can be both severe and irreversible.



We commit to ongoing prayer for the families as they continue to endure tragic and lifelong health impacts. We pray for the newly elected mayor's ability to craft a new direction for the city of Flint. We also resolve to respond to the moral call to rectify such horrifying injustice.

Christian communities have responded to the crisis swiftly with charitable action. The Week of Compassion ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the United Church of Christ, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, the Global United Fellowship, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Commission on Relief, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America have all been working to deliver clean water to Flint residents. However, the water infrastructure remains polluted.

At every level, government must act now to manage the damage. We call on Congress and the Obama Administration to leverage federal resources to ensure the City of Flint can get new, safe water infrastructure as quickly as possible. Flint residents should receive a refund for any polluted water they paid for, and they should not continue to have to pay water bills for water they cannot use. Most importantly, we call on government at every level to support the long-term ability for children who have been poisoned to cope with the health burdens they will bear for the rest of their lives.

Furthermore, we call on the Administration to strengthen the work of the Environmental Justice Division of the Environmental Protection Agency. Government analysis of the problems associated with the Flint water crisis, as well as any government solutions, must not feign “colorblindness” or ignore socio-economic status. According to the U.S. Census, more than half of Flint's residents self-identify as Black, and forty percent of Flint's residents live below the poverty line. Nationwide, communities of color are more likely to be exposed to polluted air, land, and water than predominantly white communities. This trend reflects the failure of our democracy to protect communities from market-based decision-making processes that prioritize profit over the health and well-being of people. Every level of government must take decisive action to reverse trends of environmental racism by ensuring community members are meaningfully engaged in all environmental decisions that will impact them, including selecting their water supply.

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Creation Justice Ministries represents the creation care policies of 38 Christian communions, including Baptist conventions, mainline Protestant, Historically Black Churches, Peace Church, and Orthodox communions. Learn more at www.creationjustice.org

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Religious Leaders Speak Out on the Flint Water Tragedy Voices from Michigan

"Flint families need immediate relief and the community needs enormous assistance to provide safe water for everyone. We do not yet know the full scope of this crisis, and cannot see when it will be over. On behalf of all people of faith, and as members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, I invite everyone who can get a safe drink of tap water today to help our sisters and brothers in every way they can."

- Bishop Donald Kreiss, Southeast Michigan Synod ELCA

"Christianity all too often lives out just enough generosity to let itself off a moral hook of some kind, and then goes back to business as usual, without ever considering how to make generosity less necessary. Liberal Christianity is often the worst, assuming it knows best, that it has all the answers, that it can 'fix' whatever is wrong. You're not helping. In fact, you're as bad as the state legislature that took away our meaningful vote by its emergency manager law. You're as bad as the Christians over the centuries who colonized so many countries and forced assimilation. We don't need you trying to take over right now; we don't need you telling us how to be Flint. We do need you asking questions, offering to join in what we're doing, listening to folks on the ground here who have been living with this for way longer than you've been hearing it on the news. Help, yes. But first, please pay attention."

- Rev. Dr. Deborah DeMars Conrad, Pastor, Woodside Church in Flint, MI

At my request, a \$10,000 UMCOR emergency grant was released to assist the eight United Methodist congregations in Flint to start "Water Resource Centers," distributing water filters, replacement filters, water testing kits, and educational information to neighborhood residents. I am grateful for the Crossroads District's response. This is good and important work, but we know it is only an immediate, short-term response. Flint's pressing need for a new water infrastructure and the Flint children who face life-long cognitive and behavioral effects of lead poisoning require comprehensive and long-term solutions. We must deal with the systemic issues of racism and poverty that have been part of this complex issue. As United Methodists in Michigan I believe we must be part of those long-term solutions; we must be among those who are first on the scene and last to leave.

- Bishop Deborah Lieder Kiesey, Michigan Conference, United Church of Christ

Voices of National Church Leaders

"The water crisis is appalling. We are in this era and kids are dying because of lead poisoning because the governor wanted to save money and did not take into consideration the lives of so many people. Without the means or without the income to justify authority to do it. There were people at the very outset who knew this was wrong. Our church and our 2.5 million members, as well as the other historically Black communions, strongly condemn this act by those who were in charge. We pray that they will actively, quickly solve this problem. We are praying for those kids and family members who have already been affected by such an injustice. I can't find anything worse than somebody not being able to drink a glass of water, take a bath, be able to refresh themselves after a day with something as simple as a glass of water. I am speaking for myself and many members of my denomination. This type of social injustice cannot prevail any longer and we must speak truth to power. We can no longer be afraid of that which we do not have, and all we have is family. We ought not be afraid to articulate to the world that this is unfair, and will not go away quietly."

- Senior Bishop George E. Battle, Jr, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

"The AME Church, in responding to the severe environmental crisis in Flint, is aware not only of the serious health threats but also the recently elected mayor's plan for corrective action. Not only is Vernon AME Chapel involved, but it is also the home church for the newly elected Mayor of Flint, Dr. Karen Weaver. We stand ready to advocate for accountable government that she has proposed."

- Jacqueline Dupont Walker, Director, Social Action Commission, African Methodist Episcopal Church