

**A Set of Lesson Plans for At This Point**  
**By: Rev. Jill Patterson Tolbert**  
**For the Spring 2015 Issue**  
**“Common Waters: Global Water Crises and Christian Baptism”**

## **Lesson 1**

### **Concept**

The purpose of the study is to consider the global water crisis as it relates to our call as baptized Christians of the Living Water. The lesson will challenge participants to imagine how Christians might speak to issues underlying of our current water crisis. Participants will begin thinking about ways to respond personally to the crisis, both as it affects them close at home and as it affects neighbors far and near.

### **Timeframe**

The lesson is written for a 45-minute class period. However, depending on class size and participation, it may be too much material. Plan carefully for your time, prioritizing the topics that are most relevant for your context, and make adjustments as needed.

### **Goal**

The goal of this session is to a) introduce the water crisis through specific examples, b) encourage participants to begin to wrestle with their own water use and abuse and c) begin considering ways in which we might respond and live into our call as Christians baptized in the Living Waters as it relates to the global use and abuse of the earth’s waters, especially in light of the fact that water is God’s *gift* to us, not *our* possession.

### **Objectives**

Participants will:

1. Explain the overall theme of the lesson.
2. List at least three ways water played a role in the stories of our faith as found in scripture.
3. Identify at least three specific ways in which water is “in crisis.”
4. List at least three insights to the current water crisis that arise from our baptismal wisdom.
5. Identify at least three ways individuals can respond positively to address local or global water contests, contamination, or scarcity.

### **Preparation**

1. Participants should have read Martha Moore Keish’s lead article, “*Common Waters: Global water crises and Christian baptism.*”
2. Arrange the room in a way that is conducive to both large group discussion and small group sharing, ideally with tables for three to five people that are easily accessible and arranged to face a common space in one area of the room.

3. Write the following statement on the board: **“As we gather, begin to formulate a list of distinctly different ways that water plays a role in your life.”**

### Materials

1. Bibles
2. White / Chalk board or a sheet of poster board and pens / chalk
3. paper and pen/cil/s at each table

### Sequence

1. Opening – (See question on board) As participants gather, have them brainstorm together the many ways water plays a role in their own lives—drinking, bathing, cooking, lawncare, recreation, etc. After a brief period of time for sharing, ask the groups to summarize their conversations. **Have someone summarize the collective list on a white/chalkboard or on a sheet of poster board for reference throughout the study as needed.**
2. Explore – Assign the following verse/s for small group consideration. Instruct each group to read the assigned verse/s together, expanding the reading for context as necessary. Discuss the role that water plays in each verse or passage. Then consider what each might be saying to us regarding the understanding of water, both at the time of each writing as well as in our current context.
  - a. Isaiah 33: 15-16
  - b. Jeremiah 2:13
  - c. Amos 5:24
  - d. John 4: 13-14
  - e. Mark 9:41
3. Encounter –
  - a. Ask participants to share their initial reactions to the scripture passages as well as the lead article. Make a list of questions or wonderings that might have arisen for them as a result of these two readings.
  - b. Invite participants to discuss the three ways water is “in crisis,” sharing any personal experiences that might be relevant.
4. Respond –
  - a. Return to the list of ways water plays a role in our individual lives. Invite participants to consider ways they might personally address the water crisis in light of their own water consumption, and challenge them to act on them in the week ahead.
  - b. Encourage participants to pay attention to water-related issues in the news over the course of these sessions. Invite them to bring in articles, video clips, etc. to share with each other throughout the study.

5. Closing – End with prayer, using the following words, or relevant words of your own choosing: “Gracious and merciful God, thank you for the many opportunities that we have to learn about and care for your beautiful creation. We know we are fortunate to have access to clean water for drinking, cooking, bathing, and even recreating, and yet we take it for granted. Forgive us. Open our eyes to the ways that we have misused and abused the resources you have given us. Open our hearts and minds to what you might be saying to us, asking of us, with each new day, with each encounter that we have with others, and even with each breath we take. In your son’s name we pray, Amen.”

**A Set of Lesson Plans for At This Point**  
**By: Rev. Jill Patterson Tolbert**  
**For the Spring 2015 Issue**  
**“Common Waters: Global Water Crises and Christian Baptism”**

## **Lesson Two**

### **Concept**

The purpose of the study is to consider more deeply the sacramental character of water, especially in light of the global reality of scarcity and overconsumption. The lesson will present participants with concrete ways in which the sacramental character of water has been utterly lost, and challenge them to consider ways to reclaim it. Participants will continue thinking about ways to respond in their own ways to the water crisis as it affects them close at home and as it affects neighbors far and near.

### **Timeframe**

The lesson is written for a 45-minute class period. However, depending on class size and participation it may be too much material. Plan carefully for your time, prioritizing the topics that are most relevant for your context, and make adjustments as needed.

### **Goal**

The goal of this session is a) to enable participants to understand what we mean by a sacramental character of water , b) to encourage participants to consider ways in which consumption leads to irreverence , and c) to begin to consider our own call to preserve waters as a gift from God to be shared rather than a resource for hoarding or overconsumption.

### **Objectives**

Participants will:

1. Explain the overall purpose of the lesson.
2. List at least three ways in which the sacramental character of water is portrayed in ancient art or scripture. .
3. Identify at least three ways in which current culture ignores or abuses the sacramental character of water.
4. Describe the shift from water provided solely by God to water “provided” by human work and ingenuity.
5. List at least three concrete ways in which your particular congregation might help raise awareness surrounding the sacramental character of water and encourage congregants to help reclaim it.

### **Preparation**

1. Participants should have read Moore-Keish’s lead article as well as Stanley Saunders’ response to it.

2. Arrange the room in a way that is conducive to both large group discussion and small group sharing, ideally with tables for four to six people that are easily accessible and arranged to face a common space in one area of the room
3. Write the following statement on the board: **“Consider the various images of water presented around the room. Describe how each image most clearly reflects either a sacramental or irreverent use of water.”**

### Material

1. Bible/s
2. White / Chalk board or a sheet of poster board and pens / chalk
3. paper and pen/cil/s at each table
4. Various water images from books or an internet search, ideally presented in a way that conserves paper.
5. Beginnings of a list of water statistics or trivia resulting from an initial Google search.
6. Lyrics for NeedToBreathe’s song “Washed by the Water”

### Sequence

1. Opening –
  - a. As participants gather, if possible, have NeedToBreathe’s “Washed by the Water” playing in the background while participants are encouraged to reflect on the various images of water that can be found around the room, and consider how the image portrays water.
  - b. Begin the formal time together either by
    - i. reflecting on the lyrics to the song, or
    - ii. sharing their reflections on the water images.
  - c. Consider using the chorus from “Washed by the Water” as your opening prayer, or pray your own opening prayer.
2. Explore –
  - a. Living Waters for the World is a mission resource of the PCUSA. In their curriculum for vacation Bible School (<http://www.livingwatersfortheworld.org/vbs.php>) they list several eye-opening water statistics and trivia. Use their list, or collect your own, and print each one on a separate slip of paper to distribute to smaller groups of participants (2 to 4). Encourage them participants to share their initial reactions to the various facts, and to reflect on how that reality shows an irreverence of God’s gift of water.
  - b. Invite participants to consider the facts in light of Rasmussen’s quote, “When water is a market commodity in a plastic bottle piled on supermarket shelves it is no longer sacramental.”
3. Encounter –
  - a. Using the following passages from scripture, comment on the ancient understanding of water as a key element in the creation story. How might its

ancient significance help reframe a return to the sacramental character in today's context?

- i. Genesis 3: 4-15
    - ii. Ezekiel 47: 1-12
    - iii. Revelation 22: 1-5
  - b. Spend time in small groups discussing one or more of the following questions:
    - i. Is there a place in your life that you consider "holy" because "things move rightly within it" and because this place "can rectify the trajectory of what crosses it?" (cf Sawicki via Sanders article, p. 4)
    - ii. Read Hebrews 10:22 and reflect on your own baptism, or the baptism of a child in your life through that lens. What role does water play in baptism in light of this verse?
    - iii. Saunders suggests "daily remembrance(s) of our baptisms...as a way to affirm the sacramental, 'living' character of water." What can serve as daily reminders of baptism for you and those with whom you are close?
4. Respond – Brainstorm particular ways in which your congregation might work towards recovering the God-given, sacramental character of water. Possible options include:
  - i. Organizing a trip to Clean Water U, a training school by Living Waters for the World in rural Mississippi.
  - ii. Participating in a Wine to Water or other event.
  - iii. Getting involved in a global, state, or local water justice organization of your choosing, supporting them financially as well as by raising awareness.
5. Closing – End by replaying the song "Washed by the Water" by NeedToBreathe. Allow this song, or one similar such as "Water" by David Lamotte, to serve as your closing prayer, or close using a prayer of your own, similar to this: "Lord, as we leave this place today, continue to nurture us and wash us clean in the waters of baptism. Help us to remember that all water is a gift from you to us, and help us act accordingly in our own day to day lives. Amen."

**A Set of Lesson Plans for At This Point**  
**By: Rev. Jill Patterson Tolbert**  
**For the Spring 2015 Issue**  
**“Common Waters: Global Water Crises and Christian Baptism”**

### **Lesson Three**

#### **Concept**

The purpose of the study is to continue to examine the global water crisis, this time with an eye towards the ways water can be both destructive and life-giving. The lesson will encourage participants to investigate how water is used in other religions, and to use our own experience as practicing Christians to begin thinking about how baptism might create a frame for growing awareness for the global water crisis.

#### **Timeframe**

The lesson is written for a 45-minute class period. However, depending on class size and participation, it may be too much material. Plan carefully for your time, prioritizing the topics that are most relevant for your context, and make adjustments as needed.

#### **Goal**

The goals of this session are to

- a) enable participants to continue to expand their understanding of
  - i) the global water crisis,
  - ii) the idea of water as sacramental and belonging to God, and
  - iii) the role that we should play as Christians “baptized in water” in addressing the global water crisis, and to
- b) continue to imagine ways in which they can respond to the issues of water justice in their own lives and contexts, however large or small.

#### **Objectives**

Participants will:

1. Explain the overall purpose of the lesson.
2. Identify at least one way that water is used in each of the following major world religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, & Christianity.
3. Citing scripture or various Christian hymns, identify at least two ways (each) in which water sustains, destroys, and blesses life in the context of Christianity.

#### **Preparation**

1. Participants should have Moore-Keish’s lead article, as well as Rachel Hart Winter’s response. It would be helpful, though not necessary, to have read Saunders’ response article as well.

2. Arrange the room in a way that is conducive to both large group discussion and small group sharing, ideally with tables for four to six people that are easily accessible and arranged to face a common space in one area of the room
3. Write the following on the board: **“In 1224, Francis of Assisi described water as ‘useful, humble, precious and pure.’ As we gather, reflect on this statement in light of our current relationship to water.”**

### Materials

1. Copies of the Presbyterian Hymnal or Glory to God, or copies of any of the following hymns:
  - a. “Baptized in Water,” #492, PH
  - b. “All Things Bright and Beautiful,” #267, PH
  - c. “Out of Deep, Unordered Water,” #494, PH or #484, GtG
  - d. “Crashing Waters at Creation,” #476, GtG
  - e. “Ho, All Who Thirst,” #479, GtG
2. If possible, a recording or live pianist / musician that will allow the tune to be heard of the above hymns.
3. White / Chalk board or a sheet of poster board and pens / chalk
4. paper and pen/cil/s at each table
5. Internet access via smartphones, ipads / tablets, or laptop computers.
6. Bible/s

### Sequence

1. Opening –
  - a. As participants gather, encourage them to reflect with others at their table on the question written on the board.
  - b. As the lesson begins, invite each group to share their reflections on the opening statement, encouraging them to draw on personal experience when possible.
2. Explore – As you transition, say: “Just as water was precious and pure to St. Francis, it is also used as a symbol of sacred cleansing in other religions. Now, we will spend a few minutes discovering more about the symbolism of water in five of the world’s major religions.”
  - a. Divide participants into five separate groups, and assign each group one of the following religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. Using smartphones, tablets, or ipads, instruct each group to find at least one way that water is symbolic or sacred in their assigned religion.
  - b. Re-gather participants and invite them to share their findings with the larger group. Record these on a white or chalk board for easy reference.
3. Encounter –
  - a. Distribute hymnals to participants, and invite them to follow along with each hymn as it is played or sung. Invite each participant to select one or two hymns on which to focus, and consider the following questions:

- i. How is water referenced in your selected hymn?
  - ii. In your selected hymn/s, does water sustain? Destroy? Bless? If so, how?
  - iii. Are there other natural elements referenced in your hymn in a sacramental way? If so, which ones? How are they sacramental?
- b. Invite participants to find references to water in scripture and consider the questions above. Suggested passages include, but are not limited to, those surrounding the following verse/s:
  - i. John 3: 1-5
  - ii. Isaiah 55: 10-11
  - iii. Hosea 6:3
  - iv. Ezekiel 36:25
  - v. Hebrews 10:22
  - vi. Genesis 7:21-23
  - vii. John 2:7-11

4. Respond – Winter writes:

“We can all learn from places and cultures that conserve water, recognize the great power of water, and respect God’s sacred creation by caring for water. We can begin to use our baptism to become part of a community to work in earnest to care for our community—working to raise awareness about climate change, the rising ocean level, the severe weather that claims more lives each year....What if each time we renewed our baptismal vows we did so with a new ethical awareness for what we must do to protect God’s waters?”

Invite participants to share steps they may have taken towards addressing the global water crisis in their own way since beginning this study two weeks ago. Consider providing supplies to write to their legislator or local government representative regarding water-related issues, or approaching the mission committee of their local congregation to adopt a water-related mission in the coming year.

5. Closing – Use the following words, or something similar of your own design, as the closing prayer:

Creator God and Giver of life, we thank you for this day.

God of those who waters water, of those who walk for water, of those who long for water, we thank you for your unending gifts.

May the vision of water for all who need it become reality.

Grant us the Living Water that refreshes and gives new life so that we might become your hands and feet in the work for water justice for all.

**A Set of Lesson Plans for At This Point**  
**By: Rev. Jill Patterson Tolbert**  
**For the Spring 2015 Issue**  
**“Common Waters: Global Water Crises and Christian Baptism”**

## **Lesson Four**

### **Concept**

The purpose of the study is to encourage participants to challenge themselves and each other, as baptized Christians, to renew their commitment to honor the sacredness of water and to remember that all water belongs first and foremost to God. Participants will be asked to reflect on their learning and exploration over the past four weeks and encouraged to continue their wrestling with the call to water-related justice issues beyond these conversations, and take their response out into their day-to-day lives.

### **Timeframe**

The lesson is written for a 45-minute class period. However, depending on class size and participation, it may be too much material. Plan carefully for your time, prioritizing the topics that are most relevant for your context, and make adjustments as needed.

### **Goal**

The goal of this session is to a) allow participants to reflect on “improving their Baptism” (cf Westminster LC, Q167) as it relates to the global water crisis, and to b) encourage participants to begin to think beyond water justice to *all areas* of justice as they relate to our call to be Christ’s hands and feet in the world today.

### **Objectives**

Participants will:

1. Explain the overall purpose of the lesson.
2. Identify three ways in which baptism speaks to the gift of water, especially as it is contested, contaminated, and scarce.
3. Summarize the 2002 UN General Comment / Covenant on the human right to water.
4. Summarize the Westminster Larger Catechism’s question on baptism and summarize its response in everyday language.
5. List at least three ways in which their church or denomination does (or might begin to) lift up environmental justice / stewardship as important to a life of faith.

### **Preparation**

1. Participants should have read Moore-Keish’s lead article as well as Mark Koenig’s response essay. Ideally, participants will have read all five essays by now, including Moore-Keish’s final response.

2. Arrange the room in a way that is conducive to both large group discussion and small group sharing, ideally with tables for four to six people that are easily accessible and arranged to face a common space in one area of the room
3. Write the following on the board: **“Reflect on ways the current consumer culture reinforces the notion that water is not a gift but rather a commodity. As other participants enter, work on a list together.”**

### Materials

1. Bibles
2. Copies of the baptism liturgy from the PCUSA or your particular denomination / tradition. (This can be found here: <http://bookoforder.info/Book-of-Common-Worship.pdf> on p. 403.)
3. Copies of the Book of Confession, or a copy of WC-7.277, question 167 from the Westminster Confession.
4. Baptismal bowl / pitcher filled with water, stones for daily remembering.
5. White / Chalk board or a sheet of poster board and pens / chalk
6. paper and pen/cil/s at each table
7. Literature or website links / addresses for various groups that work to alleviate water contamination or scarcity, or to help in the peaceful resolution of disagreements surrounding disputed water.

### Sequence

1. Opening –
  - a. As participants gather, encourage them to join in with others to formulate a list per the opening question on the board.
  - b. As the lesson begins, invite each group to share the ways that water is treated as a commodity for humans to barter rather than a gift from God to us all.
2. Explore –
  - a. Distribute copies of the baptism liturgy found in the Book of Common worship. Invite participants to gather in groups of 3 to 5 and reflect on the words, noticing the way water is referenced and used throughout. Ask: “In what ways do these words challenge us today as we wrap up our study of the global water crisis?”
  - b. Invite participants to recall Koenig’s 3 statements on baptism and water justice (in italics in his response essay). In light of the baptism liturgy in hand, invite participants to list concrete ways that Christian baptism might:
    - i. orient us to a new creation
    - ii. show us water is a gift from God
    - iii. orient us to the waters of creation
3. Encounter –
  - a. Question 167 in the Westminster Larger Catechism asks: “How is our Baptism to be improved by us?” Moore-Keish suggests: “To improve our baptism” is to take seriously the call to discipleship that comes in and through the grace-

soaked sacrament.” Invite the group to consider responses to the global water crisis as ways we might “improve our baptism.”

- b. As the group continues to discuss this concept, take the pitcher filled with water and pour it into the bowl where stones have been placed. Swirl your hands in the water and stir the stones around. Invite participants to continue to wrestle with the challenge to see water, to see ALL of creation, as God’s gift TO us, not our possession to hoard or control.

#### 4. Respond –

- a. Invite participants to become familiar with any of the following as a way to continue pursuing environmental justice issues:
  - i. “Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice,” adopted by the 202<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the PCUSA.
  - ii. Earth Care Congregations, a program that encourages congregations to care for God’s creation and celebrates those who have committed to doing so.
  - iii. Become familiar with local faith-based environmental programs, such as Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, Living Waters for the World in Alabama, Presbyterians for Earth Care in your own presbytery / region, etc.
- b. Invite participants to commit to participating in further adult education / awareness opportunities related to care of creation / environmental justice by:
  - i. Planning or facilitating another class on related topics
  - ii. Forming a book study around the topic of creation stewardship.
  - iii. Instituting a recycling program in your local congregation if one does not already exist
  - iv. Planning a “no waste” fellowship meal, where no disposable products are used, and all leftover foods are donated or consumed later.
  - v. Organizing a trip to your local farmers market and / or a discussion group about the farm-to-table options in your community.

#### 5. Closing –

- a. Distribute the stones in the baptismal bowl to participants as you close. When everyone has a stone, invite them to join you in prayer, using the following words, or relevant words of your own choosing.

*We give you thanks, Eternal God, for the ways you nourish and sustain all living things through the gift of water. By water and the Holy Spirit, we trust that we are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to Christ’s ministry of love, peace, **and justice.** Amen.*