

Christian Groups: 'Liquid Gold' Essential for Life

By Ethan Cole
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It is abundant and often free in the United States, but for more than a billion people around the globe it is a rare and precious commodity on which life hangs.



(Photo: ACT-Caritas / Paul Jeffrey, File)

A child carries a container into a camp for displaced people in Darfur, Sudan, in this undated file photo.

The so-called “liquid gold” of the world’s poorest is being highlighted Thursday on World Water Day in an effort to raise awareness on the lack of safe drinking water that results in the deaths of thousands each day.

“In the developing world, clean water represents life,” explained Compassion International, one of the world’s largest Christian groups working with poor children, in a statement. “[But] [f]inding it can be a challenge to the poor, who often can’t afford it.”

Five thousand children die each day from water-related illnesses such as diarrhea, according to the United Nations. These deaths are in part due to lack of clean water, which is too expensive or inaccessible in developing countries.

According to UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund), inadequate access to clean drinking water is the second biggest killer of children under the age of five.

Overall, more than 13,000 people die each day due to water-related diseases.

To counter the problem, Compassion teamed up with Healing Waters International to bring clean water to 17 Compassion-assisted projects in the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Guatemala.

Healing waters is a ministry that works with indigenous churches in the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Guatemala and Kenya to build self-sustaining projects that make safe drinking water available to the poor. Since 2002, Healing Waters has distributed more than 50 gallons of water, including more than 15 million gallons at Compassion programs.

“The Compassion/Healing Waters partnership is much more than just the distribution of water – it’s about saving lives,” said Gregg Keen, executive director of program development for Compassion.

Keen highlighted that more than 1.5 million children under the age of five die each year because of lack of sanitation or clean water.

In addition to the Compassion/Healing Waters partnership, the United Methodist Board of Church and Society also partnered with the U.S. Fund for UNICEF to help provide clean water to children in developing countries.

The Tap Project, which launched last year in New York, involved more than 1,000 U.S. restaurants in 16 cities this year during the week of Mar. 15-22. Participating restaurants helped raise funds by charging \$1 for a glass of tap water instead of giving it for free.

The \$1 charged for a glass of tap water in the United States can provide clean, safe water for a child for 40 days, the United Methodist News Service reported.

Other Christian groups working to provide clean water to the world's poor include: Living Water International, Jars of Clay's Blood:Water Mission, New Life International, Catholic Relief Services, Church World Service, and World Vision.

In its 2007 gift catalog, World Vision noted that it costs \$18,000 to build a deep well that could provide up to 2,800 gallons of safe water a day for as many as 300 people. But the world's largest Christian relief and development organization encouraged people who cannot fund the entire well by themselves to donate \$100 and help purchase a share of a deep well.

World Water Day was started by the U.N. General Assembly in 1992 to draw attention to the plight of people without access to safe drinking water. This year, World Water Day coincides with the International Year of Sanitation. The United Nations is calling on humanitarian groups to help more people become aware that poor sanitation often goes hand-in-hand with lack of safe drinking water.