Kids2Kids Current Affairs Project:

Responding to the Flint Water Crisis

An intergenerational resource from Disciples Family & Children's Ministries



INTRODUCTION

How important is good, clean water to your everyday life?

What would your life be like without it?



More questions to think about and discuss...

- What if you couldn't drink or cook with the water coming out of the faucets in your house?
- What if taking baths or showers in the water made your skin red, itchy, and sore?
- What if your clothes came out of the washer smelling funny and looking brown instead of clean?
- What if the water coming out of your faucets made you sick in ways that could last a lifetime?

Usually when we talk about problems with water we think of other countries, *not ours.* It's hard to imagine having no clean water here in the United States, but this is exactly what has been happening for more than a year for as many as 9,000 children under the age of six in Flint, Michigan. What is worse, until recently no one told them that their water was not only dirty, but full of chemicals and bacteria which made them sick. And, until recently, no one stepped up to help them get clean water.

It will take a long time to build a new water system and Flint's children will need support for treating their health problems caused by the poison water. The people of Flint feel confused, angry, frightened, and helpless. Government officials are responding slowly, but there is a lot that we as Christians and caring citizens can do to help. Our Christian faith calls us to respond both by praying for Flint's children and taking action for compassion and justice as advocates and citizens. What can we do personally and through our churches?

Part 1: HUMAN THIRST & FAITH IN ACTION

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)

THIRST...

The Bible talks a lot about people being thirsty, sometimes for actual water and sometimes for spiritual "water." We need both for refreshment, renewal, and hope for tomorrow. Both are necessary for our life's flourishing. As Christians we are called to do what we can to make sure that all God's children have access to both kinds of water for their life's flourishing.

Questions for reflection:

- Have you ever been **really hot and thirsty** and couldn't get a cool drink of water right away? What was it like? How did you feel?
- What refreshed and renewed you? Where did you have to go to get it? (like the kitchen sink, your refrigerator, a water fountain on the playground or at school, a restaurant, or store) Was it easy or hard to get? Was it free or did you (or someone else) have to pay money for it? Did you trust that the source was safe for you (clean and good)?
- What if you couldn't go to the usual places in your home or school to get something to refreshing to drink and you had no money or ability to get it elsewhere? How would that feel?

This is what the children in Flint and their families have felt like for more than a year. They felt sad and lonely; frustrated and confused; angry and scared, because it seemed like there was nowhere for them to turn for help.

Where do you go when you feel sad and lonely, confused or scared and need someone or something to help you feel better? A parent or caregiver, your best friend, your room, your friends at church, or your pastor? If no one is around to help us we can be "thirsty" for emotional and spiritual refreshment for a long time, and this is very sad. Jesus doesn't want people to suffer being either physically, emotionally, or spiritually thirsty.





When you are "thirsty" in your body, or your spirit, or your heart, and you find something or someone to help you, you are blessed! Many people in the world are less fortunate than we are and do not have others to give them what they need. Sometimes the adults in their city, town, or country do not have the resources to help them either, including with clean water. Those of us who have caring persons and adequate resources for our health and wellbeing are privileged.

We should always thank God for our privilege, and seek to share out of the abundance of our privilege with those, like the children in Flint and children in developing countries, who do not have it, because in the end our faith reminds us that we are all interconnected. Their good is our good and our good is their good.

FAITH ...

I Corinthians 12: 12-26 (NRSV) One Body with Many Members

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into



one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

"Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. "And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. "If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? "But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. "If all were a single member, where would the body be? "As it is, there are many members, yet one body. "The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." "22 On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, "and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; "whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, "5" that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. "6" If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Our Judeo-Christian tradition calls us to act on behalf of the common good for all as a part of God's desire for "shalom" (healing and wholeness, peace and justice) for all God's creation, human and non-human. This is the main context in which parents and caregivers can explain to children the our duty to engage in acts of both compassion (charity) and justice seeking, Responding creatively to the water crisis in Flint is a good opportunity for parents and caregivers to share in intergenerational learning through experiencing faith in action as together we seek economic, racial, and environmental justice in a way that will ripple out for the sake of the common good of our whole world. This is the spirit of the following remarks made by civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr, in a speech in 1967.

It really boils down to this: that **all life is interrelated.** We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. **We are made to live together** because of the interrelated structure of reality. Did you ever stop to think that you can't leave

for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? You get up in the morning and go to the bathroom and reach over for the sponge, and that's handed to you by a Pacific islander. You reach for a bar of soap, and that's given to you at the hands of a Frenchman. And then you go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that's poured into your cup by a South American. And maybe you want tea: that's poured into your cup by a Chinese. Or maybe you're desirous of having cocoa for breakfast, and that's poured into



your cup by a West African. And then you reach over for your toast, and that's given to you at the hands of an English-speaking farmer, not to mention the baker. And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half the world. This is the way our universe is structured, this is its interrelated quality. We aren't going to have peace on Earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality.

Our Christian faith calls us to set our priorities in light of something called "the common good". The common good is understood in different ways, but basically, it is the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (p. 89, "Children, Consumerism and The Common Good" by Mary M. Doyle Roche) Author Mary M Doyle Roche says that today, because our global interdependence is continually increasing, when we think of the common good, we must ultimately, take into account the good of the whole human race, and not just our own social group. We believe that all children and families should have equal access to clean water and sanitation (sanitation, which is making something clean or free of germs and conducive to health, is usually related to access to clean water). These two things are essential not only to everyone's health and wellbeing, but the common good of all.

So, when a system for basic water and sanitation breaks down in a city like Flint, Michigan, it ultimately affects all of us and our common good. We are called to not only act compassionately and seek justice for children in Flint, but also to learn from it to protect children elsewhere, even perhaps children in our own cities and towns. Many of us live in aging cities where our trust of government officials cannot be assumed. In a democracy like ours it is our jobs as citizens to stay aware of important issues as they arise and let the appropriate authorities know our concerns.



Today, in an era of widespread need for governmental cost cutting measures we are specially called to take responsibility for learning about and keeping track of what is most important to us as Christians, especially the quality of basic human services to our community, which includes not only access to clean water and sanitation but health care, housing, and schools!

In addition, in situations like those in Flint, we are to advocate especially for poor persons in our society who are most vulnerable to institutional neglect and discrimination because of implicit or explicit racial injustice. The majority of the people most affected by the water crisis in Flint are African-American and Latino persons living in poverty. We are called to both pray and act on their behalf.

FORMING PARTNERSHIPS FOR FAITH IN ACTION ...

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)

In partnership with other faith-based relief agencies the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is directly helping churches to buy and distribute clean water (in bottles and in large tanker trucks) and provide funds to help rebuild the broken water systems. We must also advocate for change through our ecumenical partners like Creation Justice Ministries (www.creationjustice.org).

In fact, the biblical tradition upon which we Christians build our basic sense of justice and goodness calls us over and over again to be God's partners in *bringing water to the thirsty and feeding the hungry, caring for the sick and seeking justice for the oppressed.* (Isaiah 21:14)

Through the stories and parables which Jesus told, and the way he lived his life, we can see that Jesus believed that it is the duty of faithful persons to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, welcome strangers, clothe the naked, care for the sick and visit persons who are in prison (Matthew 25:4-40). But in the story of Jesus talking to the Samaritan woman at the well we also see him suggest that the water of spiritual refreshment and eternal life is vitally important for the work of people of faith to go forth. "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." (John 4:16-13)

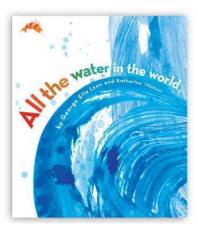
Never has there been a clearer call for us to learn and respond with faith in action than the recent water crisis in Flint, Michigan.

Part 2: THE WATER CYCLE & THE GLOBAL WATER CRISIS

Water, Water Everywhere and Not a Drop to Drink ...

Even apart from our Biblical mandate, it is clear that in this interdependent world, concerning ourselves with promoting access to

safe, clean water is an important part of our ministry and mission as a church both globally and locally. What do you know about the role of water on the Earth? As we look around the world, most of us recognize that a lack of access to healthy, clean water often relates directly to other issues such as hunger and disease and lack of sanitation. When an area suffers a lack of water called a drought, in addition to harm caused to people, there is widespread environmental destruction of animals, important forests resources, and crops. But did you know that a lack of water also often relates to issues of profound unemployment and poverty, racial inequality, and violent "water wars"? There is a fine book written on this subject called All the Water in the World by George Ella Lyon with a lesson guide available at www.georgeellalyon.com/files/water_guide.pdf



All the Water in the World by George Ella Lyon

The Growing Global Water Crisis

More than 10% of the world's population lacks a regular supply of usable water. The United Nations publishes new International Water Day resources for children and families every March 22 at www.unwater.org/worldwaterday/home. Access to water means access to jobs. There is a fun interactive video about water and jobs at http://waterandjobs.org. There are many other resources for learning provided by organizations such as The Water Project (www.thewaterproject.org) and UNICEF "WASH" project (www.unicef/wash.org) among others, which can help us learn about access to water and related issues around the world (See our resources list at the end of this project quide.)

Global Ministries and Water

With or without the unpredictability of climate change, access to clean water is becoming a growing problem throughout the developing world. To address this concern, our Global Ministries and its ecumenical partners are working daily to bring clean water to families in the Congo, China, Egypt, Palestine/Israel, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. (See information about our special water projects at www.qlobalministries.org/water.)



Week of Compassion

The Flint, Michigan situation has highlighted the fact that lack of access to clean water is not confined to developing countries. More and more of our cities in the United States have aging public service infrastructures (roads, bridges, water and sewer systems, schools, etc.) which need

to be better maintained or even replaced. Sadly when one combines neglect of advanced planning and public policymaking with a general priority on cost cutting measures by government officials, the greatest toll seems to always be taken on poverty stricken children and families, and especially those of color, who are trapped living in deteriorating neighborhoods.



Fortunately, our churches always come together to help cities in crisis like Flint or neighborhoods in New Orleans which were greatly damaged by flooding during Hurricane Katrina. Our primary way to help is through our Week of Compassion Fund which, with the help of the following partner agencies, is the relief, refugee and development mission fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada. (www.weekofcompassion.org)



But before we talk about what specific things we can do to help out the children and families of Flint, let's talk about how things in Flint got so bad . . .

Background on the Flint Water Problem

In April 2014 an emergency management official appointed by Michigan's Governor, Rick Snyder, switched Flint's water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River as a cost-saving measure.

Commenting on this "reckless" decision in her "Child Watch" column of March 2016, Marian Wright Edelman (found of the Children's Defense Fund) says that after that, authorities either disregarded or hid evidence and misled residents about the quality of their water. They could clearly see, taste and smell the water problem themselves.

In her column Ms. Edelman reports that the state provided bottled water for its own employees in Flint ten months before they notified the general population of the fact that their water now had high levels of polluted, highly corrosive contaminates, including lead and various bacteria.



It is hard to imagine that the authorities of put the city's financial concerns ahead of concerns for children and families quality of life and well-being. Currently, the temporary solution has been for local churches and other agencies provide bottled water for families in Flint for drinking, cooking, and bathing. This can't go on forever. The number of plastic water bottles is a secondary problem which is being created in Flint. Dr. Deborah Conrad, pastor of Woodside Church in Flint, asks that we "work on getting safe and affordable water to all the residents of the city, it is also critical that people of faith have a clear understanding of how this could happen, so that we can agitate, Jesus-style, for better public policies and a greater regard for the common good." (www.woodsidechurch.net/flint-water-emergency)



Ms. Edelman says the clock is ticking. We must act NOW. Children in Flint have already suffered from high levels of lead in their blood.

These levels can cause biological and

neurological damage linked to learning disabilities, brain damage, developmental delays, behavioral problems, and yes, Ms. Edelman, goes on to add, academic failure, juvenile delinquency, high blood pressure and death. Especially vulnerable are pregnant women, babies and young children. (www.childrensdefense.org/newsroom/child-watch-columns/child-watch-documents/FlintsDisposablePoorChildren.html)

Part 3: ACTIONS WE CAN TAKE RIGHT NOW . . .

For Christians, the water problem in Flint serves as a good learning opportunity for what it means to join with hope-filled partners and God to really make a difference that can be seen and measured ... starting right now.

1. Raising funds and donating them to our Week of Compassion Fund is a good place to start: www.weekofcompassion.org/our-impact/2016/1/18/water-crisis-in-flint-michigan

Week of Compassion funds directly support a joint effort of the Michigan Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ called Gospel in Action – Flint. Gospel in Action – Flint supports Flint congregations such as Vermont Christian Church and Woodside Congregational Church which have become "water re-fill stations" providing free water, in-home water filtering systems and other needed items to Flint residents. They will continue to do so throughout the many, many months it will take to rebuild the water system. Instead of small water bottles, dozens of tanker trucks called "water buffaloes" need to be sent to hydrate and sanitize the city.

While Federal Emergency Funds have been made available to the city of Flint and its residents, this assistance will only cover approximately 75% of the very high costs to rebuild their water system. A small delegation of church leaders are also meeting with leaders in the area, to express their care and concern in person, and build relationships which will be needed to support recovery efforts for the long haul.

- 2. Learn about Flint's water crisis and about your own town or city's water supply.
 - Where does your water come from?
 - What is in it?
 - How is it monitored for pollutants?
- 3. Become aware of your own privilege with regard to access to clean water.
- 4. Share what you learn about privilege and access to water locally and globally.
- 5. Talk about the differences between acts of charity and acts of justice seeking when dealing with issues relating to access to clean water.
 - What is the difference between acts of charity and actions of justice?
 - Why are both types of action necessary?
- 6. Prayerfully discern where and how you, your family and your church can make a difference.
 - Do you feel called to one type of action or the other (charity or justice seeking)?
 - How can you partner with others to respond to God's call for both types of action in relation to access to water, not only in Flint but around the globe?
- 7. As of April 2016 there is a Christian advocacy petition to encourage your Senators to pass the Drinking Water Safety and Infrastructure Act (S. 2579) to provide assistance to Flint and establish a pathway for other communities in similar trouble to seek federal funding. Adults can sign it online at http://org.salsalabs.com/o/125/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=19300
- **8. Call Michigan Governor Rick Snyder** at 517-373-3400 or register your opinions with Governor Snyder online at https://somgovweb.state.mi.us/GovRelations/ShareOpinion.aspx. Urge him to
 - Expedite the process of the State of Michigan purchasing and delivering safe water for all its residents to drink (in tanks, not small plastic bottles)
 - Refund all residents the money they have been required to pay for water that they cannot drink
 - Secure ongoing state and federal funding, including from the EPA Superfund, so that permanent improvements can be made to Flint's water system.
 - Provide ongoing funding for the health of children and families as they continue to suffer from the long term effects of the polluted water and lead poisoning.
- **9. Call President Barak Obama** at 202-456-1111 or register your opinions with him at www.whitehouse.gov/contact and urge him to:
 - Encourage all appropriate federal organizations to expedite their support for addressing the immediate needs of Flint residents for safe, affordable water
 - Encourage all appropriate federal organizations to expedite their funding for short and long term improvements of Flint's water system
- 10. Pray for the families and children of Flint. Every time you drink a glass of clean, refreshing water pray "that justice may flow down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" for the families and children of Flint, Michigan. (Amos 5:24)

WATER ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

- 1. Create watercolor pictures and send them to representatives with an advocacy message. Send messages to workers in Flint dealing with the water crisis saying we are praying for them (either people working or volunteering at water supply stations, workers who have begun/are beginning to rebuild the Flint water system, or health workers working with children with lead poisoning).
- **2. Put a coin in a jar for every time you use water during the day or the week** and then give the money to one of the organizations, like Week of Compassion, listed in this guide.
- 3. Share your favorite Bible stories about water with a group or with your family. Act out the story.
- 4. Water charades Think of ways you use water. Invite children either one at a time or in teams, to act out a way they use water without talking. Invite others to guess how they are using water. After acting out ways to use water, try acting out ways to conserve or share water.
- 5. Work together to write a short poem, prayer, or song of thanks to say or sing whenever you use water.
- **6. Write or draw in a journal about all the different places you see water.** How do different creatures use water? Example How do animals at the zoo or the park use water? How do animals and plants in a river or pond use water? Write a prayer thanking God for the ways all of God's creation is connected.
- 7. Cut out water drops to use for relay races. Divide children into teams. Help them name their teams after bodies of water (lakes, oceans, or rivers). Have the kids line up at one end of a space. Stand across from them. Call out (or invite them to call out) ways to move across the space (ex. Tiptoe, glide, skip, trot, crab walk....). When they get to you, invite them to shout out praise to God in thanks for water and then have them return to their group with the same movement and sit down until everyone has had a turn.
- 8. Cut out water drops and invite children to write or draw a way to be faithful stewards of water and other parts of God's creation. Children can take water drops home as a reminder to pray for all God's creatures to have clean water, or they could hang them in the church building. Waters drops could also be used in worship with a litany or brought forth to the offering plate with an offertory prayer.
- 9. Invite children to bring unopened water bottles and build structures out of them with straws, pipe cleaners, foam or felt shapes that represent or symbolize peace (or God's shalom). Take photos of the water bottle sculptures and write messages to government representatives on the back. Then take the sculptures apart. Messages could be attached to water bottles and delivered to representatives or detached and mailed (saving the water bottles to be given to organizations collecting water).
- 10. Invite children to bring empty water bottles and other clean items that they usually recycle to create pieces of artwork which can be hung up (such as mobiles) and attach written prayers asking God to help us be faithful stewards of all God has made.
- **11. Use an online Bible to look up the word** *water.* How many times is the word *water* found in the Bible? Look up a different passage with the word water each day or each week for a month.
- 12. Find a plastic cup or reusable water bottle. Invite the children to sit in a circle and play "Wonderful Water" like one would play hot potato. When a child is holding the cup or bottle when the music or singing stops, invite them to share a reason they are thankful for water.
- 13. Water sounds Many children are probably familiar with the thunderstorm sound activity. Invite children to work together to make the sounds of a thunderstorm coming and going. Invite them to think of other sounds water makes. How can the sounds of water help us remember to be faithful stewards?
- **14. Find several blue or green balls. Roll or throw the balls back and forth.** When a child catches the ball, invite them to give thanks for a way they use water or share an idea about a way we can help everyone to have clean water.

Resources

FOR TEENS AND ADULTS

"What Is Privilege?" (video) https://youtu.be/hD5f8GuNuGQ

On the Flint situation...

"Responding to Crisis in Flint, MI" (video) by the Center for Progressive Renewal featuring UCC Environmental Justice Minister Rev. Brooks Berndt and Rev. Deb Conrad, activist pastor of Woodside Church in Flint, MI

Poisoning a City: A True Story (ebook) by Danessa Violette, 2016. www.amazon.com/Poisoning-City-A-True-Story-ebook/dp/B01C15K1ZA

Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis (book) by Andrew Highsmith, 2015.

http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/D/bo15937885.html

Tragic Impact Of Lead Poisoning On Kids: Flint Water Crisis (video) https://youtu.be/Zm8Dh133wY8

Flint's Water Crisis Explained in 3 Minutes (video) https://youtu.be/NUSiLOwkrlw

Articles

http://inthesetimes.com/article/18794/flint-water-crisis-neoliberalism-free-market-reforms-rick-snyder www.nytimes.com/2016/01/25/opinion/michigans-great-stink.htm

www.latimes.com/opinion/opinion-la/la-ol-flint-water-crisis-snyder-obama-20160121-story.html

https://thirdcoastconspiracy.wordpress.com/2016/01/18/democracy-disposability-and-the-flint-water-crisis

www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/who-poisoned-flint-michigan-20160122

 $\frac{www.freep.com/story/opinion/columnists/stephen-henderson/2016/01/30/flints-long-misery-hands-urban-policy/79531718$

www.mlive.com/news/flint/index.ssf/2016/02/flint_water_crisis_has_physica.html

On the Water Drought Crisis in the Western United States...

Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water (book) by Marc Reisner, 1993 www.amazon.com/Cadillac-Desert-American-Disappearing-Revised/dp/0140178244

Global Water Crisis...

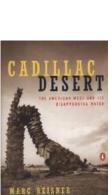
The Price of Thirst: Global Water Inequality and the Coming Chaos (book) by Karen Piper, 2014. www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/the-price-of-thirst

The Ripple Effect: The Fate of Freshwater in the Twenty-First Century (book) by Alex Prud'homme, 2011 www.alexprudhomme.com/books/the-ripple-effect

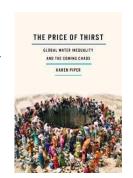
Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water (book) by Maude Barlow, 2007 www.amazon.com/Blue-Covenant-Global-Crisis-Coming/dp/1595584536

Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis and What to Do About It (book) by Robert Glennon, 2009 www.robertglennon.net/books/unquenchable

Elixir: A History of Water and Humankind (book)
by Brian Fagan, 2011 www.bloomsbury.com/us/elixir-9781608190034



DEMOLITION



FOR CHILDREN

Books

Make a Splash!: A Kid's Guide to Protecting Our Oceans, Lakes, Rivers, & Wetlands (age 8-12)

by Cathryn Berger Kaye and Philippe Cousteau

Do You Know Where Your Water Has Been? The Disgusting Story Behind What You're Drinking (sanitation investigation)

by Kelly Barnhill

Clean Water For Elirose

by Ariah Fine

You Wouldn't Want to Live Without Clean Water (age 8 and up) by Roger Canavan and David Antram

A Cool Drink of Water (global, multicultural, age 4-8) by Barbara Kerley

Water Pollution (age 8 and up) by Rhonda Lucas Donald

Every Last Drop: Bringing Clean Water Home (age 8-12) by Michelle Mulder

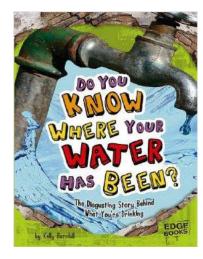
All the Water in the World (age 4-8) poetic and upbeat! by George Ella Lyon

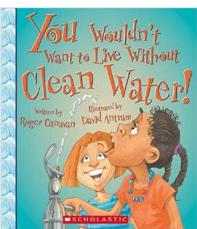
A Drop Around the World (age 8-12) by Barbara McKinney

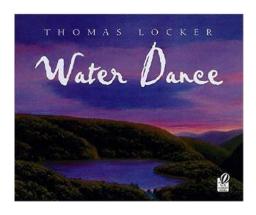
Water Dance (age 4-7) by Thomas Locker

Video

A Short Animated Explanation of "The Water Cycle" www3.epa.gov/safewater/kids/flash/flash_watercycle.html







PLEASE NOTE: Links in the "resources" section are provided for your convenience. We do not endorse any content on outside websites.



Kids to Kids is a project of Family & Children's Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and Disciples Home Missions. For more resources for all ages, visit docfamiliesandchildren.org.