

RESPONDING TO DAY ZERO

COMMUNICATION TO CONGREGATIONS

INTRODUCTION

There are few conversations as prevalent as water and scarcity right now. Even beyond our country's borders, the reality facing cities and the great need to change how we relate to water is gaining traction as the world turns their attention to Cape Town's situation. This is also not just a one year problem either, the reality is we will likely face a few more years of our water running out.

Terms like 'day zero' and 'level 6B water restrictions' and 'new normal' are now part of our daily language and understanding.

It seems like the proverbial penny has finally dropped in our minds and indeed the world's minds as we sense the realness of impending crisis that come about from a combination of climate and weather realities, city-wide dynamics and also our own individual habits.

There are several ways we can process this as Christ-followers - one is to see it as an inconvenience. Something we need to 'get through' before we can continue on the mission we feel God has for us. A mission seen as separate from the reality our city has found itself in. Another way to see this is that God has allowed this crisis to come. It is completely within his plan for our city and we should see it as part of the mission. We can ask ourselves, what is God inviting us to if we truly believe we were called for such a time as this. All through history there have been 'inconveniences' that the church existed in and yet in those very times, God was moving powerfully. We should not see the water crisis as something separate from what God has called us to as a church in this city. There are some amazing opportunities in embracing existing as God's people within a city in crisis because God is in charge, and he will move through his people who seek him and his will. The world is watching, we have an amazing opportunity to mirror God's heart for people in how we respond.

God is not silent or irrelevant. As Christ-followers, we have a unique perspective, shaped by the God who has revealed himself to us. He is the One who is above all things, who is aware of our current situation and, we believe, speaks to us in these times.

With so many relevant questions about how to save water to prevent day zero, one question may have been forgotten. This question opens up a new range of thinking, approaches, postures and opportunities. The question that Christ-followers are to ask themselves: *what might God be teaching me and us in this drought?*

This is a resource intended to inform our hearts and faith in response to the current reality of our city. It is not a 'how to' guide, as there are many resources (updated almost daily, and shared below) that can show us new and creative ways of saving water. Nor can this go into the various legislations and policies. This is more about our hearts and our posture in this time.

We have structured this to be in two sections. Firstly, what is an appropriate, gospel-shaped response for individual Christ-followers? Secondly, what are we doing, collectively as a church, in response to the current water reality in Cape Town?

HOW DO I RESPOND WELL AS A CHRIST-FOLLOWER?

With FAITH:

Now is the time to counter fear with faith.

Much of the narrative in the city is rooted in fear. Whilst there are legitimate concerns and risks that need to be considered, Christ-followers have the opportunity to live life that is rooted in faith, not fear. We are to guard our hearts, for everything we do comes from it (Pr 4:23). When fear arises in our hearts and is driving our behaviour, we are to counter it with the promises and character of God.

Psalm 146:3-6 reminds us that placing our trust in princes, or human leaders is futile, as they are not eternal and all powerful. We support, encourage and hold to account the various officials that are responsible for water in our city, but our faith is not in them. Our faith is in God, for "He is the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them— he remains faithful forever." v6.

The One who made all things is worthy of our trust and faith. He is the sustainer of all things, the provider of water, who holds the very molecules of water together. We are to coach our hearts, that when we are tempted to give in to fear and panic, we bring God's character and his promises to mind.

Pray to the one who spoke creation into being. You may feel like you want to fast. He is listening, his eyes are ever on us (Ps 33:18). Pray for rain, pray for people to use less water, pray for new supplies of water.

With STEWARDSHIP:

Now is the time to wisely steward what we have.

Even as we respond with faith, Christ-followers are to also live wisely with what they have.

The concept of stewardship is central. We recognise that all that we have comes from God, the creator of heaven and earth. Everything belongs to him. Even if you paid for it, all we have is His. We are to make wise decisions of how to reduce consumption.

Christ-followers have a tremendous opportunity to be Cape Town's best citizens. To be the ones who serve the city and, in so doing, draw attention to the One. 1 Peter 2:12 encourages us to live so differently to those around us that they may see our good deeds and glorify God. What an opportunity we have at for witness at this time!

Learn and explore how you can best save water. Go on a journey: read blogs, join Facebook groups, keep up to date with news about how you can save water. Based on your living arrangements, there are a range of things that you can implement to reduce consumption. Involve your children, help to explain why their lifestyle is changing, and get them to join in researching how to best save water. It is not too late to start changing our behaviour patterns right now, to further push out the likelihood of Day Zero hitting.

We recommend looking at the following resources for practical information:

<http://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/Graphics%20and%20educational%20material/Water%20Saving%20Checklist%20to%20Avoid%20Day%20Zero.pdf>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/watersheddingsa/about/>

<https://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/watercrisis-ideas-and-tips-from-news24-readers-20180131>

With COMPASSION:

Now is the time to grow in compassion.

It is an unfortunate reality that, in times of crisis, the human tendency is to focus more on oneself than on others. We care less for people outside of our circles. One of the sobering realities is that there are many people living in Cape Town in a permanent water and sanitation crisis. Every day is effectively a day zero.

Jesus calls his followers to love their neighbours. And not just to love them, but to love them as they love themselves (Mk 12:31). If we truly love our neighbours in our city, we should have the same desire for water and sanitation for all our neighbours. As much as we want running water, flushing toilets and good sanitation in our own homes, we should desire the same for all Capetonians. If our hearts are not moved by the reality that 300 000 people in Cape Town do not have access to flush toilets, then we need the God of compassion to work in us.

What could God be teaching us in this time? One thing could be that our hearts are to grow in compassion. We are to listen to the stories and the realities of our Cape Town neighbours. Listen, learn, engage. Allow your heart to grow in compassion. And then explore ways in which you can be part of addressing the ongoing water and sanitation issues in our Eastern suburbs.

With JUSTICE:

Now is the time to stand for what is just.

It is hard to know how day zero will impact on the typical workplace. The economic realities are difficult to predict and it seems like businesses will have to make some hard financial and staffing decisions.

Christ-followers are to be those who fight for those who are most vulnerable, who speak up on their behalf (Proverbs 31:8-9). Start conversations within your workplace that focus on protecting the employment of as many staff members as possible. Find creative ways that your workplace can support those who cannot afford the water saving devices or resources.

You may be in a position where you employ someone directly. As you discern your personal response to the water crisis, be sure to consider the needs your employee(s) have. Take care that your decisions (about temporary relocation, about water-saving methods) do not have negative consequences for those who are in your employ. Be sure to be just- seeking the best for all impacted.

With SHALOM:

Now is the time to be peace-makers.

The prophet Jeremiah was the voice piece of God in a time when Israel had been taken into captivity. Tucked away in a long prophecy there is a verse that is instructive to all Christ-followers today: "7 Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

Jeremiah 29:7

Seeking the peace, or shalom of Cape Town is a call to all Christ-followers. This finds its expression in many different ways, but one of them is in our interaction with people. As you interact with service providers or suppliers, are you leaving more peace, or taking peace away? As you make comments on social media, or engage in conversation with others, are you speaking peace? Are you pointing people to the Prince of Peace in your interactions.

The mission of God continues. Jesus is building his church. What opportunities is He giving you at this time to continue in his mission? Perhaps you are building new relationships with

your next-door-neighbour around water conversations? Could this be an inroad for spiritual conversations?

What is God teaching you in this time of drought and crisis?

HOW ARE WE RESPONDING AS A CHURCH?

With FAITH:

Together, we counter fear with faith.

As a church, with congregations across the city, we will bring messages of hope, faith and peace. We are not a people, and we are not a church, that will be moved by fear and panic. Elders, leaders, staff and volunteers are regularly praying for rain and for day zero to be averted. We will continue to call our congregants and congregations to come together and pray.

As new challenges arise regarding day zero, we will bring gospel truth and faith to lead our hearts and lives. We learn from and listen to other churches and leaders, as we discern how best to lead in this time.

We have continuously ongoing conversations about how we as a church can best respond to our communities and city should Day Zero hit.

With STEWARDSHIP:

Together, we make wise choices about our consumption.

In each congregation there are groups of leaders wisely discerning how to continue the mission of the church in the face of less, or no water. Each congregation has its own unique contexts and have prayerfully discerned how best to curb consumption.

We remain committed to pursuing the mission of Jesus in and through our church. We have, and will continue to make decisions regarding water usage. You will experience changes to Sunday meetings, events and other church gatherings. We ask that you respond with grace, understanding and a shared commitment to seeing us collectively reduce our water consumption.

On the staff premises, water reduction measures were introduced months ago and these have become more stringent as the water restrictions have increased. We continue to inform, teach and lead our staff towards utilising as little water as possible.

With COMPASSION:

Together, we are a community of compassion.

Collectively, we want to be a community that can serve the needs of those who are most affected. Whilst this will look different for each congregation, we ask that small groups talk through how they can be a caring community for those in their midst and those outside of their circles. Together, we can carry the weight of need as well as best utilise the opportunities.

Part of our longer term strategy to multiply compassion and justice is to reach those who are most vulnerable. Through the work of Common Good's The Zanokhanyo Network, we continue to serve the under- and unemployed with a transformative Job Readiness Journey. This empowers people with the confidence, skills and resources they need to obtain meaningful work. This will enable people to provide for their daily needs and not be bound to live in areas of inadequate water and sanitation.

With JUSTICE:

Together, we stand for what is just.

As a community of Christ-followers, we want to be known for our generosity.

Within our congregations and from our congregations, what are ways that we can be generous? Take time to consider what you can be sharing. There are tangible things: like water itself, sharing water-friendly devices with others, carrying big water containers for the elderly, purchasing sanitation resources for those who can't afford it. There are also intangible things, like using your time to help others make better water choices, using creativity to find solutions. In our collectiveness, our generosity can have a great impact.

In short, look for people in your sphere that you can serve. Love your neighbour.

The Common Good Schools Collaboration project is working with the WCED to see that teaching can continue in the schools in which we operate. Day zero will have a terrible effect on schools, unless sustainable and creative solutions are put in place. We are working to see that these children and schools have adequately water resources.

The leadership of Common Ground Church is has been and continues to strategise how we can respond in our togetherness. We will respond as these details unfold.

With SHALOM:

Together, we continue in the mission of the Prince of Peace.

The mission of Common Ground Church is to fill the city with the message, life and fame of Jesus Christ. We continue to pursue this mission during and after this drought.

We continue to preach the good news of Jesus - who supplies us with eternally thirst-quenching water. :”13 Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”” John 4:13-14

We are a church in the city, so we respond to reduce our consumption and lead others into appropriate responses. We are also a church for the city and will continue to share messages of eternal hope, grace and love. We continue to serve, love and reach the city and create avenues for you to be on mission, inviting friends, family, neighbours and colleagues into space to hear this good news message.

CLOSING

We have spoken about a new normal often. We think clearly right now about how we use and abuse water. We are vigilant with ourselves, our family, our community and our government. What happens if we leave the crisis? Do we think we could ever go back? Even years after the electricity crisis, we still remember and have changed many of our behaviours around how we use electricity. This is likely to be the same with water. Even friends in Joburg have said they are so scared of what has happened in Cape Town that they are reacting far quicker to imposed level 1 restrictions than before. A new normal is good and it spills passed ourselves to others. And this should be further than just our relationship with water. What other ‘new normals’ is God calling us to? Our relationships with our neighbours, our relationship with our communities and our relationships with the environment. Where are we being called to steward our love and behaviors better in our city. What new normal are we being called to over and above just water?

At this time, as Christ-followers, who are shaped by faith in a generous, loving and good God, we get to be Cape Town’s best citizens. We have been given the opportunity to show our fellow Capetonians how our faith shapes our daily realities. Let us show an unbelieving world that the body of Christ is for the good of the city.