

The Water Commitment, Shareholder Advocacy, and SSNDs

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Access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity. (Laudato Si' 30)

Six years ago, the AM Province made a Commitment to work for safe drinkable water for all people. SSNDs had already been involved with shareholder advocacy for the Human Right to water and were engaged on this issue with the corporations in which our retirement funds were invested. Now, our latest Directional Statement calls us to “discern . . . which urgent and critical global concerns we are called to address and we dare to respond boldly in unsuspected ways.” Is water one of the urgent and critical global concerns?



Yes, water is integral to all life on Earth and it is necessary for us to recognize that responsible stewardship by large corporations is essential to protect this scarce resource. We, through our membership with the *Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR)*, will continue our engagements with corporations on alleviating the negative impacts of business operations on water quality. We have been promoting the Human Right to Water by urging companies to take steps to ensure that they do not interfere with the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, as well as physically accessible and affordable water for personal and household use.

As water resources become increasingly constrained due to overconsumption, pollution and climate change, companies that treat water risks as a current strategic challenge and therefore manage this resource sustainably will be better positioned in the future. Conversely, companies that ignore these challenges put themselves, their shareholders, and more importantly, the planet and its people, at considerable risk.

At the same time, socially responsible investors link these efforts with the sixth UN Sustainable Development Goal, which calls for the availability of and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

Oil and gas production, currently, involves water-intense hydraulic fracturing (fracking) which increasingly drains scarce local water resources and results in large volumes of wastewater.



With executives from [Exxon Mobil](#), [ConocoPhillips](#), [Phillips 66](#), and [Chevron](#), SSNDs and other ICCR members have dialogued on each company's water management policies and practices, and have filed resolutions calling for disclosure of the policy on water reduction.

Along with two other institutional investors, SSNDs co-filed a resolution with [Chevron Corporation](#) on the human right to water and the reduction of water use in their operations. It will be brought to the shareholders for their votes at their annual meeting in May.

In addition to the oil and gas companies, SSNDs and other investors engage companies in the food and beverage industries, agricultural businesses, and oil-sands mining activities on their procedures to limit and restrict the pollution and overuse of water. Water stewardship is a focus area of the sustainable agriculture dialogues with [Archer Daniels Midland Co. \(ADM\)](#). Recently, ADM incorporated the Right to Water in their revised Human Rights Policy as a result of shareholder demands.

ICCR members, among them SSNDs, identified the meat industry with its multiple environmental and social impacts as one of their five major challenges for 2019. The scale of the environmental impact of the meat industry is enormous; more than a third of all land in the U.S. is dedicated to growing feed crops and providing the pastures to raise meat. What many of us do not know is that feed is the primary source of meat's growing environmental impact. Demand for feed crops is driving widespread water contamination across the country, destroying native prairies, and releasing methane and other potent greenhouse gases into the air and also into local drinking water.

Pope Francis instructs us with this message. "Greater scarcity of water will lead to an increase in the cost of food and the various products which depend on its use. Some studies warn that an acute water shortage may occur within a few decades unless urgent action is taken. The environmental repercussions could affect billions of people; it is also conceivable that the control of water by large multinational businesses may become a major source of conflict in this century." *Laudato Si* 31.

In our present political climate, we will continue to "educate, advocate and act in collaboration with other groups for the dignity of life and the care of all creation." (*Love Gives Everything*)