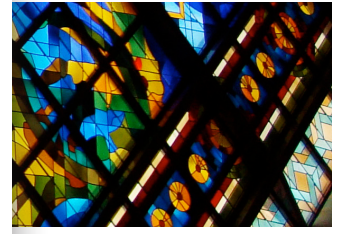


40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on *Anti-Racism*



DAY 39

Poverty is Made



Learning

Honarine Scott

As a child living in my First Nation community, I used to walk to the freshwater stream with my great-grandmother to bring water home because we did not have running water. In the wintertime, it was harder to get water because the stream and the community water pipe were frozen. Instead, we would get buckets of snow to melt in our homes.

Now that I live in the city, I can easily access water and I never have to worry about boil water advisories. Boil water advisories are warnings to the whole community not to drink or cook with the water unless it has been boiled for over a minute to kill harmful viruses or bacteria. For most people in Canada, safe and readily accessible water is not viewed as a luxury—unless you live in an Indigenous community.

Despite this and many other issues, many Indigenous people choose to stay in their communities in order to maintain their family connections, community,

cultures, and languages. No one should sacrifice that much just to have access to clean drinking water that is readily available in non-Indigenous communities.

This is the reason why I felt troubled while reading Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy. Access to safe and clean water was not included as a separate item in the "basket of goods and services" used to calculate the poverty line in Canada. Without water as part of the basket of goods, we are taking for granted the luxury of water and ignoring many Indigenous communities who are dealing with boil water advisories or cannot access their water at all. This injustice has been going on in Indigenous communities for decades.

Across Canada, over one hundred Indigenous communities have been under boil water advisories. For example, [Grassy Narrows](#) is a First Nation community in northwestern Ontario whose waterways were poisoned by lumber mill pollution from the early

1960s and 1970s. The consequences of this callous act left residents with mercury poisoning and their local economy in ruins. Today, multi-generational residents are dealing with long-term physical and mental health issues due to this environmental racism.

Although I am not from Grassy Narrows, I feel solidarity with Indigenous communities across Canada as an Indigenous person and human being. I am also angry that it took over 40 years for the Ontario provincial government to recognize Grassy Narrows' human right to water in 2016, and to commit to clean up the toxic watershed.

When I heard Prime Minister Trudeau promise to end all boil water advisories in Indigenous communities by 2021, I felt cautiously hopeful but I also thought that *I would believe it when I see it*. I became less hopeful when I learned that the David Suzuki Foundation, in partnership with Council of Canadians monitoring the federal government's progress,

reported that the work done thus far is not on track to fulfill its 2021 commitment.

I would like to say that I am surprised but I am not. Indigenous communities have been fighting for a long time to address the ramifications of colonial policies that maintain substandard conditions such as the lack of clean water. Since the signing of treaties between Canada and Indigenous

nations across the land, which paved the way for resource extraction and development from natural resources on Indigenous lands, the treaty partner who largely benefited from these activities is non-Indigenous. This is why, many say, poverty is made.

If the Poverty Reduction Strategy is to make a difference in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, access to safe and

clean water needs to be included as part of the basket of goods and services. In the meantime, you can support clean water in Indigenous communities by taking action.

*This article was originally written in 2018. In 2018, the Prime Minister promised to end all boil water advisories in Indigenous communities by 2021. Now, in the year 2021, that promise remains unfulfilled.



Faith Reflection

Springwater Hester-Meawassige

Water is precious and sacred. It is one of the basic elements needed for all life to exist. All people need to be concerned about the water in our backyards and how much of it we are using and wasting.

—Grandmother Josephine Mandamin, Anishnaabe Elder and Water Protector

Think about Josephine Mandamin's words and sit with them for a while. Take personal inventory about how much water you are using at home, and think about water every time you use it to quench your thirst, to clean, and to cook. Give thanks for the water and all that water does for you, your home, and your community. Recall how water helped us and continues to help us stay safe during the pandemic.

Reflect on the Canadian government's commitment to end the boil water advisories within First Nations communities by March 2021. Know that there are 43 communities still waiting. Pray for them, and pray that the Canadian government acts swiftly.



Children's Activity

Springwater Hester-Meawassige

Water is sacred. Water is life. Without water, there is no life. Indigenous peoples from around the world have always known the sacredness of water and have been working hard to preserve water. As a family, explore the sacredness of water by reading Indigenous literature about water.

Here are some excellent books written by Indigenous people that will help deepen your understanding and engagement.

- [*The Water Walker*](#)
by Joanne Robertson
- [*Nibi is Water*](#)
by Joanne Robertson

- [*Young Water Protectors: A Story About Standing Rock*](#)
by Aslan Tudor
- [*Nibi's Water Song*](#)
by Sunshine Tenasco



Group Commitment

Springwater Hester-Meawassige

Refuse to waste water. Refuse to take water for granted and remember the sacred gift that water is. Brainstorm creative ways to preserve water. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Get a rain barrel and start saving rainwater to water your garden and indoor plants.
- Thrift and mend your clothes—approximately 10,300 litres of water is used to make an average outfit. One pair of jeans requires 7600 litres of water, and a t-shirt needs 2700 litres of water.

- Don't let your faucet run while brushing your teeth or cleaning produce. You can also consider putting a bottle of water in the fridge so that you don't run the faucet for cool water.

Refusing to waste water is to remember and value water. Learn about water advocates. Learn about Indigenous water protectors, their activism and their fight for clean water.

Consider the following films and videos to help you on this journey:

- [*Awake: A Dream from Standing Rock*](#)
- [*There's Something in the Water*](#)
- [*The Water Walker*](#)
- Josephine Mandamin's [*Walk for Water Rights*](#)



Advocacy

Springwater Hester-Meawassige

How can we help?

- Write a letter to the Prime Minister telling him that it is time to end **ALL** boil water advisories in Indigenous communities.
- Raise awareness about the boil water crisis through social media.

- Speak to your family, friends, and community members about the crisis.
- Consider donating to the following organizations and encourage others to do so as well!

[Water First](#)

[Water for People Canada](#)

[True North Aid](#)

- Hold companies and corporations accountable (for example, the Reed Pulp and Paper Mill has caused water contamination in Grassy Narrows and Wabaseemoong First Nations; Domtar, the company behind the mill, has not taking solid steps to resolving the crisis in those communities).

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