



Watershed Discipleship

A 2.5–3 hour workshop from KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives

GOALS:

- Identify ecological justice issues affecting where you live
- Make the connections with Indigenous rights struggles
- Explore how they are part of larger contexts.

This workshop is an introduction to Watershed Discipleship, a KAIROS program to explore ecological justice and Indigenous rights: www.kairoscanada.org/watershed

PREPARATION

- Download a political map of North America (one showing provincial boundaries and capitals), or use a print map.
- Download this map of Canada's watersheds: geogratis.gc.ca/api/en/nrcan-rncan/ess-sst/96c80880-9229-59ec-b508-63b5c10cc35a.html
- Using the map, identify both your local and North American watersheds.
- Prepare the biblical texts for Step 1.
- Prepare the readings for Step 5.
- Familiarize yourself with the "Open for Justice" campaign (kairoscanada.org/openforjustice).
- You'll also need a computer and projector, flipchart paper, and markers. A wifi connection would be helpful for Step 5.

INTRODUCTION

Introduce the workshop as an entryway to KAIROS' Watershed Discipleship program, and name the goals (see box above). Before the workshop begins, make sure everyone introduces themselves. This should be very brief; you'll get to know each other later.

1. BIBLE STUDY (30 minutes)

The Bible has been used to place responsibility for the current ecological crisis on Christianity, particularly passages in Genesis in which human beings alone are created in God's image and are exhorted to exercise dominion over the Earth. But is that the whole story of our biblical connection to the land and all who share it? Is that how God expects us to exist within creation and in relation to others?

Divide in to small groups. Hand out the following texts, or ask participants to find them in a Bible.

- Genesis 9:8–17
- Leviticus 25:1–12
- Psalm 19:1–4
- Psalm 24:1–6
- Isaiah 11:6–10
- Isaiah 55:10–13
- Matthew 6:25–34
- Luke 10: 25–37
- Romans 8:18–25
- Philippians 2: 1–8

Ask the groups to read their passages and discuss:

- Is there anything in this text that helps us to reinterpret the notion that human beings alone are created in God's image and are commanded to exercise dominion over the Earth?

Facilitate a brief report-back. Ideas that might emerge include:

- Interconnection with non-human beings
- Creation itself as an active participant

- Dominion of care and responsibility (not exploitation)
- Natural limits of creation
- Need for Sabbath and rejuvenation
- Equitable relationships with other humans

Ask: “How we are called to respond to challenges to these relationships?” Explain that this will be a focus of the workshop.

2. FINDING OUR PLACE (30 minutes)

Ask the group to sit quietly and think about a place in nature that is meaningful to them. Ask them to get a clear picture of it in their mind.

Then ask:

- What makes it “your” place?
- Who came before you in this place? Who and what share it with you now?
- What, if anything, poses a threat to it? What would you do to protect it?

Depending on the size of the group, you can ask for people to report back popcorn style or have them form knee groups of two to three and share their observations.

Conclude by saying that we all have a strong connection with where we come from, but it is also probably a contested relationship. We were not here first; the relationship is not always rooted in respect. Yet it is a relationship we are called to honour.

Ask: What happens when we don’t honour these relationships?

3. WHAT’S A WATERSHED?

(30 minutes)

Ask the group if they know what a watershed is. If you don’t get these answers, integrate them into the conversation.

- A watershed is the geographical area that drains into a body of



In the Arctic Ocean watershed: the Athabasca Delta north of Fort McMurray. | Photo: Sara Stratton

water. Watersheds can be as small as *[name of your community’s local watershed, which you discovered on the watershed map you downloaded in preparation for the workshop]*, or they can be as large as one-fifth of North America. Most importantly, they are almost all connected. Our watershed is one of 594 in Canada, and is a part of the larger *[name of your North American watershed]* watershed.

- Another meaning is metaphorical. A watershed moment is the point in time when everything comes together and we must act. Right now, Canada is at a watershed moment as we face the impacts of resource extraction on the land, the water, and all that depend on them and, as the Truth and Reconciliation process begins to wind up, as we discern what it will mean to live into reconciliation with Indigenous people.

Ask the group to imagine what we mean by watershed discipleship. What is a disciple? Provide the information below if it does not emerge from the group.

- Disciples were followers of Jesus, but the Latin root of the word is *discipulus*, from *discere*, meaning

“to learn.” So following Jesus involved learning. Following Jesus also meant acting with him to help bring about a more just world rooted in right relationship.

- Watershed discipleship is a process of learning more about our place (our watershed) and the injustices that affect it, and committing ourselves to work towards right relationship in the watershed— with the Earth and all that is in it.

How do we start practising watershed discipleship? First, we need to look at the world a little differently. Let’s start with North America.

Post or project a current political map of North America. Ask the group what they see. (Many coloured shapes, some with straight lines, some irregular, some mixed. These are provinces, territories, states with politically determined borders.)

Project the watershed map of Canada. Ask the group what they see. (Five large coloured shapes, corresponding roughly to the physical map. These are the major watersheds in North America: Pacific Ocean, Arctic Ocean, Hudson Bay, Atlantic Ocean, and Gulf of Mexico. Within them are 594 local watersheds.)



In the Gulf of Mexico Watershed: North Dakota prairie. | Photo: Sara Stratton

What’s the point?

- The relatively tidy shapes we find on a political map bear no resemblance to the true shape of where we live.
- Borders created by political agreement are imposed on a natural landscape that flows from one point to another.
- From map to map, divisions and the identifiable regions become fewer while the natural connections grow stronger.
- Put in biblical terms, some maps render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s!

Ask the group:

- Which of these maps do you think are in the minds of resource extraction executives?
- Which are in the heads of policy-makers?
- Which do you see when you think about the way we exist within creation?

Explain that watershed discipleship is about asking those questions and encouraging us, while remaining aware of the realities of the political map, to better understand the interconnectedness of the watershed maps of the world we inhabit. And then it’s about taking action to protect it.

Refer to the map, and name some communities within your North American watershed that will give participants a sense of its size. For example, the Hudson Bay watershed ranges from the B.C.–Alberta border up to the tip of Baffin Island all the way down to the Quebec–Labrador border and back along the edge of the Canadian Shield.

4. WATERSHED THREAT ANALYSIS (30 minutes)

Use the North American watershed map to zoom in on your local watershed and those that neighbour it. Ask the group to name what



In the Hudson Bay watershed, geese gather in the morning light on the Winnipeg River. | Photo: Sara Stratton



In the Pacific Ocean watershed: English Bay, Vancouver. | Photo: Sara Stratton

is happening in the watershed now that threatens it. Record the information under “threats” on the flipchart.

For each threat identified, ask the group if there are key moments or opportunities where action could be taken. Record this information under “opportunities.”

Now ask who potential allies might be, and record that.

Zoom out to the entire watershed map, and ask the group to think about what specific struggles might be happening in other Canadian watersheds. Record. Ask where they see connections between struggles. Where do they see a connection with the struggles of Indigenous peoples?

Ask the group to plan what their next step will be in moving forward on local and Canadian watershed issues. This can be as simple as deciding on one issue to work on and planning a next meeting to learn more about the watershed.

5. TAKING IT GLOBAL (30 minutes)

Watersheds are globally connected. Ask three members of the group to share (one paragraph each) with the group this reflection from Emma Hebb, who in 2013 was part of a United Church delegation to visit communities in Guatemala affected by mining.

“I have often contemplated that all my time fighting for environmental causes can be traced back to my love of swimming in lakes. As a child, spending time at the family cottage on Skiff Lake, New Brunswick, was a joy.... Where I

feel closest to creation is swimming in lakes...

“Today I got to swim in Lake Izabal, near El Estor.... The diversity of plant and animal life is a testament to the lake’s health. A large area of the shoreline is protected. This allows the natural filtration system to stay intact and do its job.... Unfortunately, though, also along the coast is a nickel mine ... It seemed like only metres away from the intake pipe of the mine was the beginning of the protected coastline.

“The reason we travelled today to El Estor wasn’t just to swim in a beautiful place but also to learn the horrific history of this nickel mine. We went swimming on the lake with Angelica Choc and her son Victor. Angelica lost her husband when mine security shot him.”

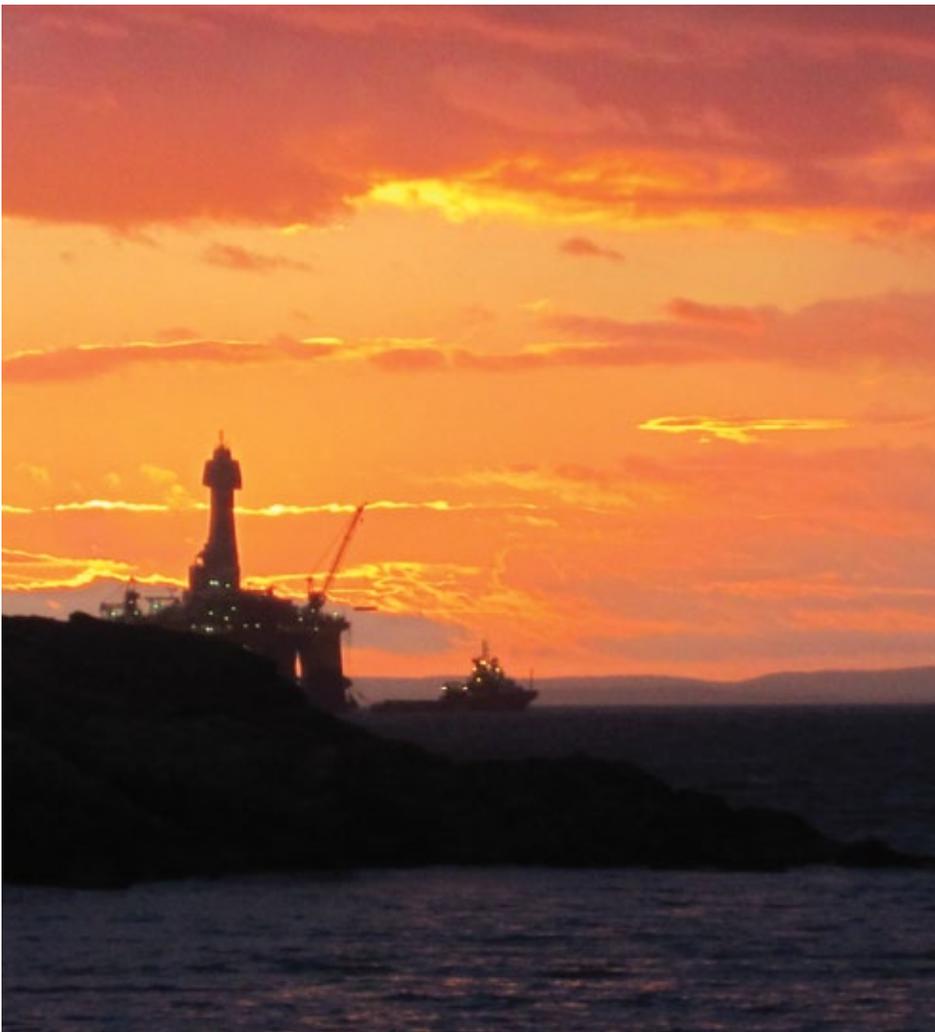
Ask:

- The mining company that Emma talks about is Canadian. Do you see a connection between your watershed issues, larger Canadian watershed issues, and Emma’s story?
- How do you see local and global issues around resource extraction and watersheds converging? Think about whom and what is being directly impacted and who is benefiting. Who are the key players? What can our role be?

Introduce the Open for Justice campaign as an effort to hold Canadian mining companies accountable for their impact on people and watersheds elsewhere in the world. Invite participants to sign the online petition.

6. CLOSING

End the workshop with prayer or song.



In the Atlantic Ocean watershed, an oil rig is moored off St. Phillip’s, Newfoundland. | Photo: Sara Stratton



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