

Update on Water Regulations and Rural Churches

Over the course of the last two years we have been involved in extensive advocacy work in regard to a Regulation that was issued following the passage of the *Ontario Safe Drinking Water Act* and the O'Connor Inquiry into the Walkerton tragedy that involved unsafe drinking water. The original Regulation (170/03) we had to deal with created very serious problems for many of our congregations that were not on municipal water systems.

This Regulation would have required them to close down their water system or to undertake very expensive measures to retain engineering expertise to design an approved water treatment system for their water source, install expensive equipment, and undertake regular and expensive testing of water samples in private laboratories.

Acting in collaboration with other denominations in the Province, a coalition (Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Roman Catholic and United Churches) was formed to jointly present to the Minister of the Environment and the government the problems that this Regulation created for us. In this effort the coalition engaged in formal and informal discussions with the Minister and Ministry involved, as well as Critics and MPP's of all three Parties at Queen's Park. In addition, a number of experts in the field helped us, on a *pro bono* basis, by providing us with many hours and many ten of thousands of dollars of professional work and advice in preparing the technical case for the changes that we proposed. These changes preserved the good intent of the Regulation, but lessened its adverse effect on us.

In this we deeply appreciate the work of Ken Pennock of the Toronto United Church Council who has done truly outstanding work on behalf of all of us.

Other groups in the Province also had problems with the Regulation and, as a result the Minister established a Special Advisory Council to review the Regulation and to advise the Minister on possible changes. In our submission to the Council we proposed, among other things, that Churches be taken out of the Industrial Sector and that a separate sector we created for them, that congregations not be required to retain the services of an engineer to design a unique system for each congregation, that the range of items being tested for be reduced by the elimination of very rare or unnecessary items, that testing be available through existing government labs rather than through more expensive private labs, that water treatment equipment not be required if water testing indicated that there was no problem.

Most importantly we strongly recommended in our discussions and submissions that our congregations be allowed to make a fundamental choice either to post signs stating that the water was not for drinking, or to decide to install water treatment equipment.

The Ministry of the Environment has now created a separate sector for us and has issued a new Regulation (252/05). This Regulation provides the changes that we requested. Of particular importance, it allows our congregations to make the choice to (1) post signs, (2) continue to test water with no need of treatment provided the tests remain clear, or (3) to install water treatment equipment.

Our congregations need to make this choice. If they chose to post signs, the Ministry of the Environment must be informed of this, and the signs must be checked regularly, and a record of these checks maintained.

The specific requirements of Regulation 252/05 can be found on the Ministry of the Environment website at <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca/envision/water/sdwa/reg252.htm>

