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Toronto Catholic high schools work to eliminate bottled water

by Rich Heffern

Eco Catholic

By Vanessa Santilli, Catholic News Service

TORONTO (CNS) -- Catholic high schools in the Archdiocese of Toronto are working to create "bottled water-free zones" within their schools.

The "Water for All: Let Justice Flow" movement is part of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace's yearlong campaign against the privatization of water.

"The idea is to create a culture where students don't bring bottled water or use bottled water even though they may have the right," said Luke Stocking, who works with Development and Peace in central Ontario.

Bottled water companies are buying more water sources and denying access to local communities in the Southern Hemisphere, said Stocking.

"Bottled water is the most visible symbol of turning this public good into a private good for private profit," he said.

At Toronto's Cardinal Carter Academy for the Arts, school officials plan to stop selling bottled water at the concession stand by the theater, said chaplain Marilyn Grace.

She said campaigners hope to create a Cardinal Carter reusable water bottle that students could take to

shows.

"But it's all an ongoing process ... it's not something that can happen overnight," she added. "We've got to get all the stakeholders on board."

Officials at Mary Ward Catholic Secondary School have applied for various grants to fund their initiatives, said teacher Kathy Saran. So far, the school has received a \$500 grant from Learning for a Sustainable Future, a registered nonprofit charitable organization whose goal is to integrate sustainability education into Canada's education system.

"We're using that money to purchase stainless steel water bottles," said Saran. "We hope to raise enough money to make it part of the uniform so that next year all of the incoming Grade 9 students get a free stainless steel bottle of water."

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Saran said the school's annual art show in April will include a section centering on the environmental theme surrounding the bottled water-free zone campaign.

At Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Secondary School in Mississauga, Ontario, chaplain Anne Brisbois Abbott said the main way the school is trying to create a bottled water-free zone is through education.

"The more education we give, the more it becomes natural not to have bottled water," she said.

Toward the end of February, the school's environmental club will set up a booth in the foyer and project an interview of actor Matt Damon speaking about the water crisis from a clip on www.water.org.

Another school conducted retreats where students focused on the duty of Catholics to be active stewards of the planet.

While the initiatives to create bottled water-free zones within high schools are ongoing, the highlight of the campaign will take place on Bottled Water Free Day. Development and Peace has invited schools to collect discarded plastic water bottles throughout the year, place pledge cards to be bottled water-free inside them and then to create pirate ships out of the plastic bottles. On March 10, these ships will be displayed at the archdiocesan Catholic Education Center.

"We're hoping it will be a celebration so that students in the Toronto Catholic District School Board recognize water as a God-given gift and celebrate that gift," said Stocking.

Jessica Lee, a leader of Just Youth, the social justice club at Cardinal Carter, said it is important for Catholic students to be aware of the world around them.

"We're always told to be compassionate and peacemakers, and it's obvious that bottled water is not fulfilling that desire to be a compassionate citizen of the global village," she said.

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