

A Church's Response to House Bill 87

Faith Covenant Church is located at 3607 Dempsey Rd. in the Huber Ridge section of Blendon Township and the city of Westerville. We have been at our current location since March of 2000. We get our water from Ohio American Water. We are a small congregation of approximately 175 weekly attendance including children. We have a small staff of two pastors and a part time secretary. Our water usage is principally related to the operation of 8 toilets mostly on Sundays. We do not have a full kitchen but only a serving kitchen with one small sink and no dishwasher. We use disposable plates and utensils.

In the past we have noticed a number instances of a dramatic increase (\$100 - \$200+) in our monthly water bill. One was when we had an undetected toilet that was malfunctioning. The second time was when we put out a 'slip-n-slide' for neighborhood youth one hot July day. We openly wondered how running a hose for a couple of hours could produce such an expense! This was a 970%, \$230 increase over the prior month at 2009 rates! We do not live day to day with the impact of these extreme water rates but it opened our eyes to what this community has to face every day.

While we do find that some of our ministries in the community are directly affected by the additional costs; what is much more important is that, as we have come to know our neighbors within the Huber Ridge community, we have learned some painful truths.

There are families close to our church who cannot afford to wash their clothes more than once a week. Parents have had to make the embarrassing choice of sending their children off to school in dirty clothes because they simply cannot afford the high cost of washing their clothes. We have also learned of families who cannot afford to have all family members take even a short daily shower because of the high cost of water within our community.

People often quote the axiom that: "cleanliness is next to godliness"...however, in Huber Ridge some families are forced to make the difficult choice between providing food and staying clean and healthy. We believe that water is a precious commodity and should be used safely and wisely. We also believe that the cost of water should not be so high that people's hygiene and well being are compromised.

Furthermore, some families within Huber Ridge seek to supplement their food supply by growing vegetables in a backyard garden. Yet, with the high cost of water within our community, even gardening can be unaffordable.

Another disturbing impact of the extreme rates is a fact that we have encountered numerous families that have either wanted to purchase homes in the area or have wished to stay in the area but feel they must look elsewhere. Never have we seen water rates become a viable factor in determining whether you can move into or stay in a particular area of town. In order for any community to remain healthy and stable, it must be attractive to new potential residents as well as retaining its current population. This negative attribute of the area is having a profound impact on the short-term and long-term health of the area.

Huber Ridge is a more modest income area. There are many young parents with limited incomes who are bearing the costs of raising a family. At the other end are many living on a fixed income with limited resources. If you have abundant income and resources, then rates such as these would not have a profound impact. In today's economy, that is not a luxury that many of us can claim. Water rates can and are truly becoming a straw that can break the camel's back.

If there were alternative utility suppliers it would stand to reason that competition would aid in keeping prices more in tune to what the rest of the county with publicly owned utilities has come to expect. This community does not have the luxury of alternatives. With Ohio American Water being unbridled in recovering their rate case expenses from their customer base, this community that is already stretched to its breaking point, suffers even more. While House Bill 87 doesn't provide a complete solution to a complex problem, it is certainly a step in the right direction. We are not asking for "special" treatment, but only fair and just treatment. Thank you for listening but more importantly, thank you for doing the right thing.

Faith Covenant Church
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