

YEAR ONE OF THE BIPOC [BLACK, INDIGENOUS, PEOPLE of Color] Young Adults Faithful Climate Action Fellowship ended on Nov. 18, 2021. This collaborative project, composed of the Creation Justice Ministries, GreenFaith, Interfaith Power & Light, United Methodist Women and Wisconsin Green Muslims, is made possible by a U.S. Climate Action Network Collaborative Grant. The fellowship's 19 young adult Muslims and Christians (ages 18-26) from the Midwest and Southeast,

learned quite a lot from a host of guest speakers. Among the wide range of topics and their intersections with climate change are environmental justice, food systems, public health, faith and climate, transit equity, federal climate landscape, public lands and global climate. The fellowship application for 2022 is available on <http://www.faithfulclimateaction.org/>.

Huda Alkaff, founder and director, Wisconsin Green Muslims

Poison Within our Water

Water, the violated community resource

BY FAATIMAH AL-MUJAAHID

THE ENVIRONMENT ISN'T JUST SOMETHING that affects us on the outside — it includes our neighborhoods and land, as well as the infrastructure and the people residing within it. But have you ever thought that the very environment in which you're living is slowly but surely killing you? Poisoning you? Imagine this. Imagine that you reside in northern Milwaukee.

In Milwaukee, the pipes that carry water to the people's homes are made of lead, a toxin that can cause irreparable harm — especially in children — like developmental delay, learning difficulties, irritability, seizures and more.

Here's the textbook definition of lead. I encourage you to read or listen to this slowly to take it all in: "Lead is a heavy, bluish-gray, soft, ductile metal, the chemical element of atomic number 82. It has been used in roofing, plumbing, ammunition, storage batteries, radiation shields, etc., and its compounds have been used in crystal glass, as an antiknock agent in gasoline, and (formerly) in paints" (<https://dictionarylist.com>).

Unfortunately, you don't have to imagine this if you're living in Milwaukee. An estimated 12 million Americans get their water from lead pipes, and Wisconsin has one of the nation's highest rates of lead service lines. We might be consuming this chemical element, which is used for roofing, plumbing and ammunition, every single day by drinking the water coming out of our kitchen faucet.

The \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill Congress sent to President Biden on Nov. 5, 2021, includes funds to remove lead pipes

countrywide. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) said on Nov. 7 that it will cost \$45-60 billion to replace every lead pipe in the country; however, it sets aside only \$15 billion to do so (<https://twitter.com/AOC>). She added that without passing Build Back Better, many communities that have historically been denied clean water will continue to be denied, although the program covers disadvantaged communities.

I don't have to imagine this because my family experienced it.*

My younger brother, a victim of lead poisoning for at least five years, was born healthy and raised in a comfortable home. But when he was six months old, he experienced his first seizure — I was an eyewitness. Being so young at the time, I didn't know that seizures could happen while a person was sleeping. My parents took the right protocol and had him examined immediately. Although its cause was never determined, as the years continued it became clear that something was going on.

When he was five years old, he still wasn't forming complete sentences. He spoke in phrases and didn't act like the normal healthy boy that he *should have* been. A test for lead poisoning revealed that the level of lead in his blood was 11.4 percent! There is *no safe* level of lead poisoning.

The home we were living in at the time was built in 1927. Homes built *before* 1975 often used lead-based paint. But because of lead's dangerous effects, federal law requires that before being obligated under contract to buy the desired housing, including most buildings built before 1978, buyers must

receive from the seller an EPA-approved information pamphlet on identifying and controlling lead-based paint hazards.

So, what does this mean for us? We were unknowingly poisoned in our own home, our safe space. For years, day after day, we ingested water and had a basement fully painted with lead. But that's not all. You don't have to ingest lead poisoning just to get it. Something as simple as breathing it in daily can poison you.

Milwaukee Water Work

PRO BOD

STREET

SIDEWALK

CORPORATION STOP

GOOSENECK

WATER MAIN

MWW owns the section from the water

WE WERE UNKNOWINGLY POISONED IN OUR OWN HOME, OUR SAFE SPACE. FOR YEARS, DAY AFTER DAY, WE INGESTED WATER AND HAD A BASEMENT FULLY PAINTED WITH LEAD. BUT THAT'S NOT ALL. YOU DON'T HAVE TO INGEST LEAD POISONING JUST TO GET IT. SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS BREATHING IT IN DAILY CAN POISON YOU.

Lead poisoning delayed the development of my brother's brain. The government's negligence delayed his ability to think, because those in positions of power choose *not* to change it because we are Black and a part of a minority.

No family should have to drink water from tainted pipes. People should advocate against the poisoning of our water

and educate themselves on the systemic racism gripping our country. After all, what else could have brought this water to Milwaukee and to the 40% of black and brown neighborhoods?

Does that sound like a coincidence to you? Don't be part of the majority that is unaware of how our day-to-day life is dictated by people we don't know and

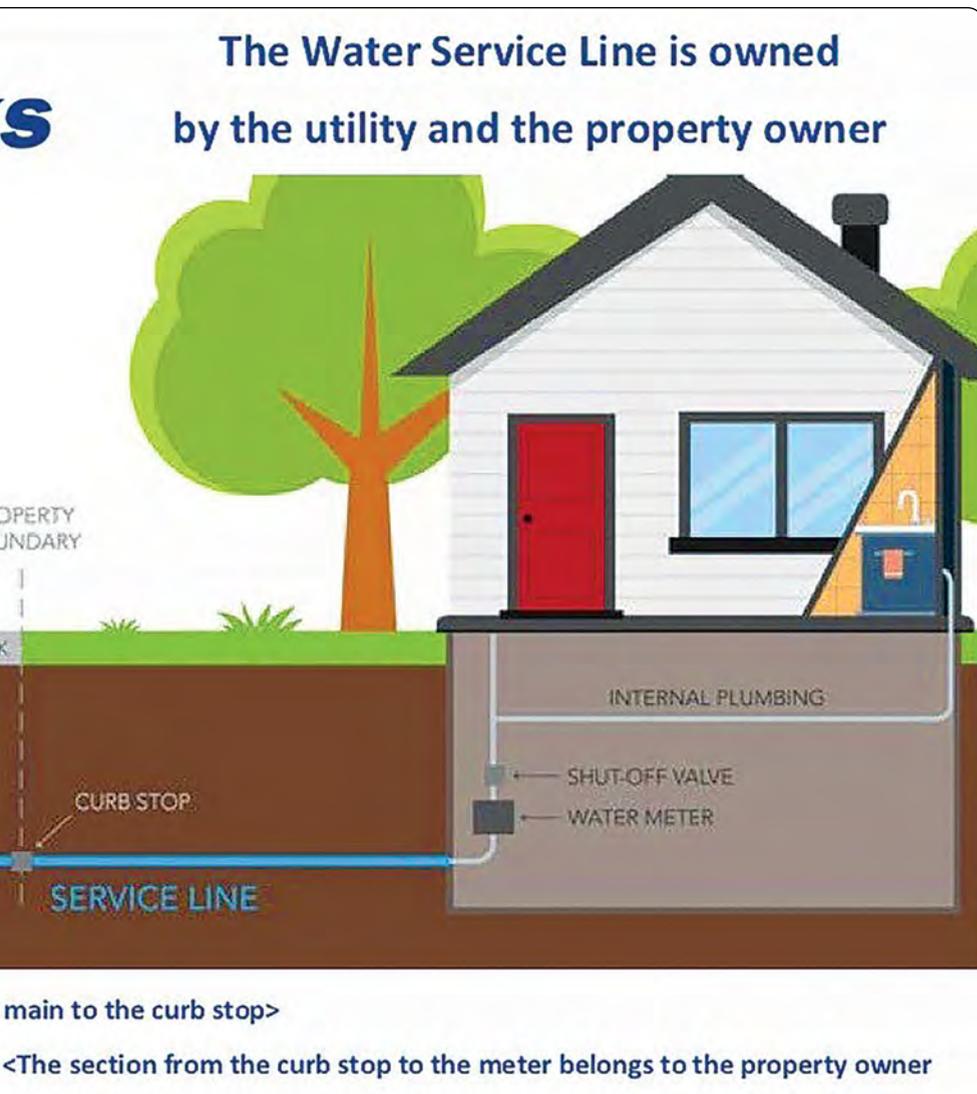
who seek to control our lives without our knowledge.

Educate yourselves about the system that dictates who looks "disabled" to them and who looks "abled." Educate yourselves so you don't fall victim to a system that doesn't care about you. Educate yourselves because the system needs you to remain ignorant so that your silence about such issues will ensure that they are never resolved. No one should ever have to feel that they aren't secure in their own homes.

Encourage all of you to call out the system that is oppressing us. Otherwise, we will never progress toward the equality and basic human rights to which we are entitled, as stated in the following hadith: "Water is a community resource and a right for all human-kind. Prophet Muhammad (*salla Allahu alayhi wa sallam*) highlights this: 'Muslims have common share in three things: grass [pasture], water, and fire [fuel]'" ("Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal," vol. 2, book 22). *ib*

Faatihah Al-Mujaahid was a 2021 BIPOC Faithful Climate Action Fellow.

* Born in Milwaukee, Wisc., she and her family had unknowingly ingested lead water for several years. It was only in 2018 that it was discovered that had lead within their blood. This inspired her to speak up for her community on getting new, lead-free water pipes.



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