

Autumn 2010

CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL

Earth Ministry

ISSUE 4 - THE ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE EDITION



Photo by Brett Mayer-Aschhoff



Source: Photojournal by Josh Anderson for the Wall Street Journal



Photo Courtesy of Sierra Club



Photo Courtesy of Sierra Club

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AFFECTS THE MOST VULNERABLE AMONG US.

BY BARBARA DENEKE

What is "Environmental Justice" and how does it relate to our own community? Does the impact of environmental damage disproportionately affect certain groups within our community? The Gulf oil spill has focused attention on how dependant that region is upon a healthy sea to sustain their fishing, shrimping, and tourism industries, as well as how powerful the oil companies have become in promoting the drilling of more wells at deeper depths with fewer expensive safety regulations just off the shores of the Gulf Coast. The reduced regulations obtained by the oil companies resulted in huge profits over many years. The impact of the environmental damage caused by the resulting spill will be felt for years by the fishermen and low income tourist industry workers whose livelihood is threatened by the spill. However, the oil industry also provided work to many of the coastal residents. Were the choices that resulted in the failure of

the Deepwater Horizon oil well made by all those who are suffering the consequences? It is unjust that some suffer tragic consequences from the choices of others, especially if those choices were made by people who do not have the same exposure. We think about these things because we know that we are given a special responsibility among creation to protect the most vulnerable of God's creation. Babies, elderly, homeless, poor, people in other countries, or those who live in the margins of our culture may be forced to endure the consequences of choices others make and can simply walk away from. This fall we will explore some of these choices and focus on why we, as Christians, need to be thoughtful about our own impact as a matter of justice. We will develop positive ideas for ways we can easily improve. For a very simplified overview on some Environmental Justice issues, see the back page of this newsletter.

Events

Foyer Group to examine Food and Faith

The book *Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread*, by Michael Schut will provide the structure for study as a special Foyer Group option this year. We will assemble as many groups as needed as we blend the joy of the longstanding tradition of CCC Foyer Groups with a special study of this thought provoking book. A few copies of the book are available in the CCC bookstore and new or used books are available through Amazon. Contact Barbara Deneke for details and sign up at <http://www.christcathedral.org/InOurChurch/FoyerGroups>.

Michael Schut at CCC

October 24, Sunday

3 services and Deans Forum

Michael Schut, a popular author and speaker, currently serves as the Economic and Environmental Affairs officer for the Episcopal Church USA following 11 years on staff of Earth Ministry. His experiences include work with homeless men, as a Park Ranger, and guiding wilderness trips. All these experiences color his writing. His most recent book is "Money and Faith: The Search for Enough". Many members at Christ Church have become familiar with his book "Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective" and his other book "Food and Faith: Justice, Joy, and Daily Bread" will be studied this year. His presentations discuss faith, justice, sustainable economics and care for all God's creation. His talk at CCC will blend these topics and inspire an introspective examination of how we presently live and how we are called to live as Christians. Michael received his M.S. in Environmental Studies from the University of Oregon in 1993 and his B.S. in Biology in 1987 from Wheaton College in Illinois. He lives in Seattle.

FOLLOW UP - TAKE IT FURTHER

Sustainability: A Matter of Faith

Kanuga Conference Center

October 17-19, 2010

<http://www.kanuga.org/conferences/2010/lee.shtml>

The Rev. Canon Sally Bingham has brought widespread attention to the link between religious faith and the environment. As one of the first faith leaders to fully recognize global warming as a core moral issue, she has mobilized thousands of religious people to put their faith into action through energy stewardship.

She is the lead author of *Love God, Heal Earth*, a collection of 21 essays on environmental stewardship by herself and fellow religious leaders. She is founder and President of Interfaith Power and Light and serves as Environmental Minister at Grace Episcopal Chapel in San Francisco.

Abandoned Amazon Oil Site

Across the world, the impact of environmental damage is felt most by the poor and those forced to live near the damaged sites. In this picture, oil sludge and waste from abandoned exploration was dumped into unlined pits in a once pristine rain forest and has fouled an area nearly the size of Delaware. This case has been in courts for 18 years.



- Households with low income spend proportionally more on basic utilities than those with higher income. Any policy that increases the cost of energy will hurt the poor the most.
- Some industries which are heavy emitters of greenhouse gases have a workforce made up by 60% minority workers. Any climate plan that fails to transition those workers to new "green energy" jobs threatens to widen the minority economic divide.
- Minorities and the poor already breathe dirtier air than other Americans and are more likely to lack health insurance. As higher temperatures hasten the chemical interactions that produce smog, these groups are going to feel the most immediate impact.

Read more: <http://www.thedailygreen.com/environmental-news/latest/global-warming->

A New Creation - Henri Nouwen's Vision for Planet Earth

St. Mary's Sewanee

November 12 - 14, 2010

<http://www.stmaryssewanee.org/programs/Nov12.shtml>

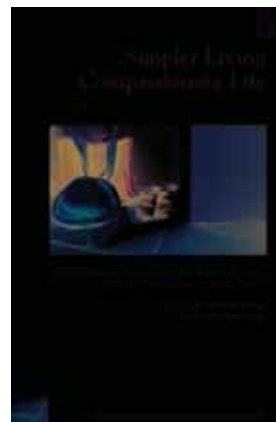
or email Jean Hastings: jeanhastings@comcast.net

Henri Nouwen's familiar writings examine Jesus' message of Belovedness. Less well known are Nouwen's reflections on Creation and the environmental crisis.

Drawing on his close friendship with Nouwen, his research for two books on Nouwen, and on his environmental work in western Massachusetts, Robert A. Jonas will explore "the Body of Christ" as a Trinitarian archetype for planetary healing.



Book Review



Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective

Edited by Michael Schut

Foreword by Bill McKibben. Living the Good News (1999), First Morehouse Publishing edition (2008).

This book has been a favorite of many CCC members and is highly recommended for any who have not yet read it. It contains contributions from great environmental writers such as Wendell Berry, Terry Tempest Williams, Henri Nouwen, Richard Foster, Cecile Andrews in addition to Michael Schut. The following review was published on Amazon.com by "Seminary Bookworm":

This book is a true jewel!!! It has great introductions to issues pertaining to Christian simplicity. It is a good introduction to one of the ways that Christian Ethics can be applied to today's world. I actually picked this book up for devotional purposes however i must admit that i actually appreciate how academic and intellectual that it really is. If you are looking for a concise volume on the Christian aspects on simplicity, this is it! It points you in the direction of other wonderful resources as well. I would highly recommend this book to people who would be intellectually minded who want to think about how their actions effect the rest of the world. . . .

*Lover of the poor,
Defender of the needy,
Sanctuary of the rejected:
for those who suffer injustice today,
for men and women who cannot provide food for their families,
and for whole communities who fear today and have no hope
for tomorrow,
we offer the longings of our hearts in prayer.
We seek for them, O God, the gifts that are dear to us:
food for the table,
drink for the soul,
shelter in the night
and open arms to welcome us.*

From Celtic Treasure by J. Phillip Newell (thanks to Benetta Ligon for this!)



Environmental Justice Tips for Living Lightly on the Planet

Become An Informed Consumer

When you purchase a product or service, always question whether your purchase may be causing suffering to someone else. Stick to your values even if it means paying a little bit more or deciding not to buy something at all. Sometimes products are lower in cost because the plant where they are manufactured does not spend the money required to provide an environmentally safe workplace for its employees. In other words, question whether the ham you just bought is less expensive because the workers in the plant are exposed to toxic chemicals or other unhealthy conditions on the job. If you show your care about the environment and fellow humans with your purchase decisions, even when those impacted are not in your neighborhood you can make a difference.



Keep PVC Off Your Back To School List - - reprint rights pending

Mossville, Louisiana is an historically African American community, founded in the late 1700's, that is the vinyl manufacturing capital of America. The area is home to more PVC chemical plants than anywhere else in the country. Communities like Mossville, where PVC is manufactured, are where the chemicals used to make PVC lunchboxes, backpacks and other school supplies are created - exposing the community and workers to highly toxic chemicals.

A US EPA study in 1999 found levels of the cancer-causing chemical vinyl chloride (one of the key chemicals used to make PVC) in the air greater than 100 times the state air quality standard. As a result of exposure to pollution, residents suffer from elevated rates of disease.

The federal government found alarming results- community members had more than three times the national average of dioxins in their blood, elevated dioxins in breast milk, and high cancer mortality rates. A university study found residents were two to three times more likely to suffer from health problems, including a high incidence of ear, nose and throat illnesses, central nervous system disturbances, and cardiovascular problems, as well as increased skin, digestive, immune and endocrine disorders.

Next time you pick up that PVC product, think about communities such as Mossville, where these products are created. (For a fabulous free download on this subject, go to <http://www.chej.org/publications/PVCGuide/PVCFree.pdf>)



Buy Locally Grown Organic Food

There is no guarantee that workers on organic farms are treated better than those on farms using pesticides. Workers on organic farms, however, do not face the health risks associated with exposure to pesticides which is present on conventional farms. By purchasing locally grown food you have a better chance of being aware of the environmental conditions on the farm from which it originated. Here again it is important to be an informed

consumer. A good farmer is justifiably proud of the good work being done on his or her farm and will not mind you asking about their farm. Most farmers at local farmers markets seem to enjoy the opportunity to talk about the farming way of life.



Conserve Electricity

Typical coal fired power plants release a huge quantity of toxins into the air. Some of those toxins settle to the ground almost immediately and create toxic zones in the neighboring areas. Many small power plants are often located on the grounds of Universities or other businesses. Children are disproportionately affected by these toxic chemicals, and as a result may suffer from afflictions such as Autism Spectrum Disorder or Cognitive Decline. The very soil on playgrounds in these areas is harmful to health. Almost all of us can make small changes to reduce the amount of electricity we consume and work to reduce this risk.



Heartfelt thanks to the Center for Health, Environment & Justice for the PVC information and especially to Darryl Hood, PhD, Meharry Medical College, for contributing information on the effects of power plant emissions and for his impressive work on this topic that benefits our community and many others. If you have a unique tip for living lightly and want to share it in a future newsletter, please contact Barbara Deneke

Join an Earth Ministry Committee!

We want to provide meaningful ways for you to grow spiritually in your stewardship of the earth. We currently need people to help with each of our programs for the 2010 - 2011 church seasons and no talents will go to waste! If you want to participate but don't know what to volunteer for, we'll help you find something that you will enjoy.

To sign up, contact Barbara Deneke

barbaradeneke@comcast.net

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Environmental Justice 101

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.

Environmental Justice is such a complex issue that it can seem too formidable to tackle, but we must - because to allow the most vulnerable to suffer for our actions while we walk away without consequence is toxic to our faith and violates God's command that we love one another. Some of the more obvious examples of where people may be suffering environmental injustice include:

Farm Workers

There have been estimates that as many as half of our farm workers in the US are undocumented, illegal immigrants. These individuals may work at factory farms where animals such as pigs or chickens are raised in conditions that could not be more different from the farm we all sang about in grade school. These individuals may work on a farm where food crops are being grown, weeding or harvesting crops. These workers cannot complain about conditions for fear of being deported. There have been incidents of these workers being sickened by application of pesticides, sometimes even while they are working in the fields. These conditions which date back to the activism of Caesar Chavez, continue today. As recently as two years ago winds carried pesticides from a neighboring field onto workers tending a grape field in California. The workers became so sick that some, including one pregnant woman, began to vomit in the field. This was an immediate response but the long term effects of this kind of exposure have only just begun to be studied.

Children at School

Many parents pay close attention to the kinds of chemicals they use to clean or control pests in their homes. However, a large portion of a child's day is spent in school or some other child care location. Virtually none of these facilities clean or control pests the way the parents do in their own homes. We don't often hear stories about children becoming ill at school but that does not mean that there is no effect on the children from the chemicals used in school or

on the playground. Schools have no control over the way in which neighboring properties are treated either, and the parents may not be aware that there is an issue. Recently, one West Nashville neighborhood discovered there was a power plant nearby that was releasing very harmful levels of toxins, exposing children in school just feet away from the plant. We are fortunate that some community activists gave voice to the neighborhood and kept at it until the power plant was closed.

Poverty

Property is less expensive in areas where the environment has been degraded, and that creates a cycle or link between dirty industry and poor neighborhoods. Poor people are the ones forced to live in environmentally damaged areas because those damaged areas are all they can afford. Many factors combine to make poorer neighborhoods less likely to have an adequate policy voice, including lack of education or lack of free time (from working multiple jobs), poor health, cultural norms, and the lack of ownership of residential properties involved. Yet, someone needs to stand up and protect these neighborhoods. It may require providing effective but healthy insect control measures or helping a community to plant trees to improve the air quality. Or it may be mean ensuring that vacant lots do not become dumping grounds where all kinds of environmental and health hazards are left. We learned from our Earth Ministry presentation in January how poorer communities in Appalachia are left without a voice and subjected to environmental degradation by coal companies. These communities are transformed from proud, self-sufficient areas into desperate wastelands where health, environment, and quality of life are devastated. In poorer neighborhoods residents can recognize that something needs to be done and yet not have the resources to do anything about it. It does not mean that the people in that neighborhood do not care. Hope can be lost when many obstacles are encountered in the quest for a healthier environment. These are situations where the community needs to be empowered.

Our faith teaches us that we must not turn our heads when our neighbors are suffering injustice, environmental or otherwise. Let us pray for justice and for the wisdom and strength to help those who need our voice.