

National Council of Churches USA

Environmental

Racism

an ecumenical study guide



Produced by the Eco-Justice Working Group
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA

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Ecumenical Environmental Racism Study Packet

Contents Listing

	<u>Page</u>
<i>Introduction</i>	2
<i>Defining Environmental Racism and Justice</i>	3
<i>Environmental Justice Principles</i>	5
<i>A Brief History of the Movement</i>	7
<i>Modern Examples of Environmental Racism and Injustice</i>	8
<i>Theological Reflections</i>	10
<i>Study and reflection</i>	11
<i>Historical overview</i>	13
<i>Action Steps</i>	14
<i>Resources</i>	16

Introduction

As Christians we have been called to follow Jesus Christ, to walk in his ways of mercy, justice, love and truth-telling. While we gather to worship, study the Bible, and offer our lives to God as part of our interior Christian life, we know that to embody and share the good news also means that we must attend to the world around us. Sometimes, we are required to move outside comfort zones to confront societal and religious laws and practices that conflict with our understanding of God's desire for the world.

We read in John 3:16-17 that God so loved world that God gave God's only Son, in order that the world might be saved. In this scripture reading, God's entire creation is saved in Christ and loved by God. As Christian disciples trying to spread this good news, we must pay particular attention to those in God's creation who are currently most neglected, those to whom God's love is not transmitted through societal and religious structures.

Approaching environmental racism and justice from our Christian faith perspective, we are called first to insist upon justice for all of God's people and creatures. We must never forget the need to protect, defend, and care for God's creation—the earth and all non-human creatures. While we remember this larger ecological framework, our goal in this study packet is to look particularly at human lives and human environments. In learning about environmental racism and justice, we shall reflect on issues such as how people's health and lives are affected by the air they breathe, the water they drink, the food they eat, the health they possess, and the environments (school, work, urban, rural) in which they live.

Some people are affected by environmental hazards more than others. In the United States and around the world, more people of color live and work in unhealthy, polluted environments than do white people. People living in middle and upper class neighborhoods often are able to avoid toxic dumping, nuclear waste, or sewage treatment near their homes, schools, and work places. They are also



It is imperative that we do not forget the need to protect, defend, and care for God's creation.

privileged to receive a better response from government agencies to their requests for environment law enforcement and creation of clean, healthy green spaces.¹ Our goal in this packet is to study these discrepancies and to become equipped to advocate for the spreading of environmental privileges and the elimination (or fair distribution) of environmental harms.

In 1987 the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial Justice issued a "Report on Race and Toxic Wastes in the United States." Race, more than class, was shown to be a determining factor in where hazardous, toxic sites would be built and maintained.²

Communities of color receive slower, less effective response from regulatory agencies while companies caught polluting these communities have fewer penalties and cheaper fines than their counterparts in white neighborhoods.³

People of color face worse health burdens (asthma, cancer, birth defects) because of environmental pollution and have less access to health care, information, means of participation, and economic and political influence in the processes of environmental decisions, laws, and policies.⁴

These realities led to the coining of the phrase “environmental racism.” Recognizing that harsh environmental impacts and the movement for justice extends to low-income communities regardless of race, both the phenomenon and the movement often use the term environmental justice.

There is power in the act of defining determines how the world sees, understands, and responds to that which is being defined. Variances in definition and a diversity of voices are key to fully understanding the complexities and layers of environmental injustice.

Therefore, this resource does not create one definition of environmental racism or environmental justice. It instead offers a collection of definitions, through which a fuller understanding can be drawn. You are invited to read and reflect on each definition in its own right.

Particularly important are the Principles of Environmental Justice that close this reflection section. Through these principles we read the voices of a gathered community of people of color who have first hand experience of environmental racism.

Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all people, free from any form of discrimination and bias.

Defining Environmental Justice

Charles Lee:

Environmental racism refers to the disproportionate impact of environmental contamination on communities of color. It refers to racial discrimination in formulating and carrying out environmental policy. It refers to the decisions to put hazardous waste facilities and other unwanted land uses in predominantly poor and people-of-color communities. It refers to the adverse health effects that result from the unkind treatment of the environment in these communities. And it refers to the lack of persons of color in the leadership of the environmental movement and in the environmental workplace.

—God’s Earth, Our Home, session 7 “Environmental Racism”

Karen Baker-Fletcher:

Sooner or later, poisons shot into the environment affect all of us wherever we live, because water flows into water, air currents rush into air currents. No one desires to live in locations with unhealthy air, water, soil. Yet we all do, whether we live in the inner city with its extreme problems of pollution, or in poor rural areas with high levels of toxic waste, or in suburbs witnessing the removal of trees for further development, or anyone wondering how long it will take the smog from the cities to make its way to our backyard. Ecological injustice is a global problem.

Alienation, too, is a global problem. We begin with concerns about the communities where we were born and where our families still live, as well as communities where we live and work now. From there, the multi-faceted, far-reaching, all-encompassing problem of environmental injustice requires that we move out to consider macro-ecological problems and the interrelatedness of all of our lives.

—*Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit, pages 4-5*

Shantilal Bhagat:

Environmental racism is sin, and like all other sins, it cannot be overcome by human strength or resolve alone. Only through the power of Christ, who alone is our deliverer from sin, and whose death earned forgiveness for all of our offenses, are we able to combat the sin of environmental racism.

—Your Health and the Environment: A Christian Perspective, session 12, pages 54-55, “Environmental Racism and Health”

Larry Rasmussen:

The task is creating reconciling and reconciled socio-environmental community. And the obstacle is not diversity, biological or otherwise. It is injustice, moral privilege, and exclusion. What would such community spiritual-moral formation for eco-justice mean for churches working together with other institutions and movements? It would require shedding the remnants of complex domination systems that have oppressed both peoples and the land.

—Earth Habitat, Introduction, p 6

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, culture, education, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Fair Treatment means that no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal environmental programs and policies.

Meaningful involvement means that:

- 1) potentially affected community residents have an appropriate opportunity to participate in decisions about a proposed activity that will affect their environmental and/or health;
- 2) the public’s contribution can influence the regulatory agency’s decision;
- 3) the concerns of all participants involved will be considered in the decision-making process; and 4) the decision-makers seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.

(Adopted, Washington D.C., October 1991, First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit)

Preamble

We, the People of Color, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby reestablish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother

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Environmental Justice Principles

Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages, and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to insure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and to secure our political, economic, and cultural liberation that has been denied over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

1. Environmental Justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental Justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all people, free from any form of discrimination and bias.
3. Environmental Justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental Justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
5. Environmental Justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental Justice demands the cessation of production of all toxins, hazardous wastes and radioactive materials and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental Justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation.
8. Environmental Justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. Environmental Justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustices to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
10. Environmental Justice considers government acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the UN Convention on Genocide.
11. Environmental Justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
12. Environmental Justice affirms the need for an urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.
13. Environmental Justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
14. Environmental Justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
15. Environmental Justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16. Environmental Justice calls for the education of present and future generations that emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17. Environmental Justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Earth's resources and produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decisions to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.



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Historical Overview

Brief History of the Movement

Throughout history, vulnerable communities have suffered from the contamination of their natural surroundings as well as from being used in the exploitation of land or extraction of natural resources. Although perhaps not originally understood under the auspices of what we now name environmental racism/injustice, the history includes such atrocities such as spraying toxic chemicals on native peoples and their land to clear that land for “development” in the Brazilian rainforest, forcibly removing Native Americans from their land and relocating them to new lands with few rights over natural resources, and enslaving Africans to work on United States plantations in which land, animals, and people become commodities.¹ More

Environmental racism and injustice includes such things as placing toxic dumps in African-American communities, spraying pesticides on fields in which migrant farmworkers labor, military testing and pollution near Native American reservations or islands such as Vieques, and exporting modern companies’ most toxic processes and products to Third World countries.

recently, environmental racism and injustice include such things as placing toxic dumps in African-American communities, spraying pesticides on fields in which migrant farmworkers labor, military testing and pollution near Native American reservations or islands such as Vieques, and exporting modern companies’ most toxic processes and products to Third World countries.

In the United States, what is currently named the environmental justice movement—the movement to confront environmental injustices—began in the 1980s. What is often classified as the first case of resistance that sparked the environmental justice movement in the U.S. was an act of civil disobedience by citizens of Warren County, North Carolina in 1982. Citizens and friends of this predominantly African-American community protested for six weeks the siting of a poly-chlorinated biphenyl (PCB) landfill in their neighborhood. The community knew the potential hazards of the landfill, did not want their neighborhood to be a dump for other people’s toxic waste, and decided they would not tolerate it. Black churchwomen laid down on the road to block the dump trucks with the PCM-contaminated soil. A biracial march also protested the dumping. In two weeks, over four hundred protesters were arrested. These events led to the 1987 United Church of Christ Commission of Racial Justice “Report on Race and Toxic Wastes in the United States,” the first study that documented the disproportionate placement of toxic sites in communities of color.²

In 1991, approximately a thousand people came to Washington, D.C., for the first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit. Individuals and groups working for environmental justice in different regions of the country were able to network, share stories, and look at common challenges. Participants in the Summit wrestled with the wide range of concerns and sought to create strategies and solutions together.

Modern Examples of Environmental Racism and Injustice

There are many ways to understand and categorize environmental racism and injustice. A few modern day cases include:

- Migrant farm workers experience health problems from pesticide-laden fields. Throughout the South and West United States, farmworkers have documented illnesses from pesticide poisoning, including death, infertility, birth defects and miscarriages, and respiratory infections.³ In its organizing, the United Farm Workers (UFW) fights dangerous pesticide use; in its initial stages, OFW fought the use of DDT and helped in its eventual banning.⁴
- People who live in neighborhoods with environmental injustice experience increased risk of major health concerns such as lead poisoning and asthma. Six out of seven Manhattan bus depots are located in and around Harlem, a predominantly African-American community experiencing death and illness from asthma at an alarming rate.⁵
- Native American land is contaminated. Navajos living near Rio Puerco, New Mexico have found their health, as well as that of their animals and drinking water, adversely affected by the many uranium mines surrounding the area.⁶
- Low-income housing is located near sewage treatment plants, landfills, power plants, or toxic dumps. Describing Atgeld Garden, a housing project in the Southeast Side of Chicago in which nearly all residents are African-Americans, Hazel Johnson said, “We’re sitting in a center of a donut surrounded by a hazardous waste incinerator that gives off PCB’s, seven landfills that are constantly growing...there are chemical plants, a paint factory, two steel mills... We have lots of cancer, respiratory problems, birth deformities.”⁷

The Environmental Justice Movement Continues
Since the early part of the movement, the naming, studying, and struggling against environmental racism and injustice has intensified even as the disproportionate impact continues to worsen. As a response to the above-mentioned cases of environmental racism, local individuals and community groups continue to work for environmental justice. Strategies include organizing and speaking out at community meetings and hearings, filing suits against polluting companies, petitioning, gaining media attention, statistical studies, and community education.

Just like the women who laid down in the road to block the PCB-soil from entering their community in Warren County, NC, local environmental justice organizations are often led by ordinary citizens—grandmothers, school teachers, pastors, parents—who witness the unfair treatment of their community and decide to act. For instance, Hazel Johnson, a mother of seven, responded to her concerns about environmental racism in Altgeld Gardens (Chicago) by starting People for Community Recovery, a community organization educating about the health and environmental hazards that minority and low-income people face.⁸

Nationally, people also come together to combat the continued trend of environmental racism. The second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit was held in Washington D.C. on October 23-27, 2002. Participants at this Summit reviewed accomplishments of the past 11 years, networked between grassroots communities, and discussed how to build a national unified movement for Environmental Justice.

The U.S. government has made some efforts to respond to grassroots concerns. In the early 1990s, the EPA created a task force on Environmental Equity; issued a report of its findings; created Farm Worker Protection Regulations; made environmental justice an agency priority and established the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council.

In 1994, President Clinton issued Executive Order 12898 “Federal Action to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-income Populations.” Currently, EPA regional offices offer environmental justice trainings across the country and continue to hear from grassroots groups who urge the EPA to better regulate, enforce, and act on EPA policies.

Churches have been inextricably linked to the work for environmental justice. One of the earliest widespread, mainstream documents, “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States,” was issued by the United Church of Christ’s Commission on Racial Justice (1987) and the coining of the term “environmental racism” is attributed to one of its authors who was ordained clergy. Church members are often among organizers and protestors of environmental injustice at the local level, such as the Warren County, NC churchwomen.

On a national level, many denominations have issued statements or policies specifically addressing environmental racism. In addition, the National Council of Churches (NCC) helped host hearings on toxic pollution in the late 1980s, supported attendees at the two National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summits (1991 and 2002), sponsored a National Black Church Environmental and Economic Justice Summit (Washington, DC, 1993), and includes environmental justice concerns in its development of resources.

¹ In the Amazon, ranchers cleared the rainforest by spraying Agent Orange from airplanes, “thereby polluting soils and river, and killing many people, especially the Nhambiquara Indians...” (Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 97). The American Indian Movement was born of incidences of exploitation of land in conjunction with exploitation of Native Americans such as the Indian resistance at Pine Ridge in 1975, as their corrupt Tribal Chair signed away rights for mineral exploration in their sacred Black Hills (Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster, *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), p. 26). Regarding African enslavement and U.S. plantations, Carolyn Merchant writes, “the slave system caused both the destruction of black bodies and contributed to the rapid degradation of southern soils as tobacco, rice, sugar, and cotton all became cash crops in an expanding world market.” (Carolyn Merchant, *Reinventing Eden: The Fate of Nature in Western Culture*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p.156).

² Though the Warren County 1982 protest and the UCC Commission of Racial Justice statement can be found in almost any text on environmental racism and justice, once source is the article “Whose Earth Is It, Anyway?” written by James H. Cone, included in *Earth Habitat* (Hessel and Rasmussen).

³ Dorceta E. Taylor, “Environmental Justice: the Birth of a Movement” in *Dollars and Sense* March-April 1996. As reprinted at http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2548/is_n204/ai_18541085.

⁴ Cole and Foster. *From the Ground Up*, 27

⁵ Peggy M. Shepard, “Issues of Community Empowerment,” p. 160-166.

⁶ Taylor, “Environmental Justice.”

Adapted from “Environmental Racism,” written by Karl Grossman in *The Environmental Ethics and Policy Book*, ed. Donald VanDeVeer and Christine Pierce, 2nd edition. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1998).

⁸ *Ibid*.

Theological Reflections

In Genesis 2:15, God places humans in God's creation to till and to keep it (Genesis 2:15)¹. Not only are humans asked to be responsible stewards of the Earth we inhabit but also for the Earth God loves. God's covenant and care extend to all God's creatures. In covenant with Noah, Noah's descendants, and "with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth" God establishes the covenant that never again shall flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood (Genesis 9:8-11).

We have tilled ungraciously and kept God's covenant badly. We have not honored the covenant between God and every living creature. Through polluting air, land and water, through stripping the earth of non-renewable resources, through relentless consumption of natural resources, and through exploiting God's people, we do damage to the creation that God created and called good.

In addition to the covenant God makes in Genesis, God sends Jesus as a way to teach, lead, and save God's creation. In Luke 4:18, Jesus reads aloud the scroll of the prophet Isaiah "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This scripture asserts the imperative for active healing of social injustices as well as the healing of the land (the jubilee year).

Throughout the New Testament scriptures, we witness Jesus keeping company with, setting an example of, and urging attention to the poor and the oppressed. As Christians, we are called to seek justice particularly for people who are overlooked or oppressed by current unjust systems, such as people of color experiencing environmental racism.

Knowing that we are called to work for justice for all God's creation, and being assured of God's constant presence and guidance with us, we are empowered to confront environmental racism and injustice. We believe that God is at work to save the world and that God, through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, will be with us as we advocate God's just reign "on earth as it is in heaven." Thus are we called and emboldened to stand in solidarity and action with people already working for environmental justice.

Purpose

This section is intended as a guide for those individuals and groups who wish really to study—to reflect on, pray over, act on, and incorporate into faith—concerns of environmental justice. This guide can be used to conduct a four-week study series for an adult education hour, for an evening discussion group, or for individual reflection.

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stripping the earth of
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created and called good.

Study and Reflection

In studying the resource packet in the context of prayer, scripture, and reflection/action, it is hoped that your experience with the written materials in sections 1-4 will be a more meditative, reflective, and insightful time. You are then encouraged to choose at least one suggestion in the “Action Steps” section that you/your group can follow.

Process:

1. Open in prayer.
2. Read the scripture. If desired, read the scripture meditatively through *lectio divina*, a method of prayerful reading of the Bible. To practice *lectio divina*, read the passage a few times out loud and slowly. By the second or third time, allow a particular phrase or word to stand out to you. Share this word or phrase as a way that God is speaking to you today.
3. Read the section from the resource packet aloud. (For a group, it is helpful if each person has at least a photocopy of the section for the day so they can follow along and refer back to the section as needed.)
4. Use the “For Reflection and Action” questions to respond to the prayer, scripture, and information from the section.

It is imperative that in this study of environmental racism and justice that we do not forget the need to protect, defend, and care for God’s creation.

Section 1. Introduction

Opening Prayer: O God, Our Rock, speak to us ‘deep calls to deep.’ May your steadfast love empower us. May we hope in you and work for wholeness, peace, and justice for all of your creation.

Scripture Reading: Psalm 42

Read Introduction (page 3)

For Reflection and Action

- 1) Imagine the psalmist as someone speaking from a community experiencing environmental injustice as described above. What thoughts or feelings come to you?
- 2) What issues do you think of when you think of an environmentalist? What issues come to mind when you think of a human rights advocate? Can you think of examples of when these things seem to be at odds with each other? Can you think of a specific example, from your own experience or community, of an issue that is of concern to both of these audiences?
- 3) As a person of faith, do you connect social concerns and environmental concerns? If so, how? Why?
- 4) Where have you witnessed or experienced environmental injustice in your own life? How has it affected your spiritual journey?

Closing Prayer

God, fill us with your steadfast love as we wrestle with harsh realities. May your voice guide us in our reflections and actions.

Section 2. Defining Environmental Racism and Justice

Opening Prayer: God our Creator, may your presence, your words, and your will be made known to us through the reading and thinking we do this day.

Scripture: Isaiah 43:1-2

Read Defining Environmental Racism and Justice (page 5).

For Reflection and Action

1. What elements of the definitions of environmental racism and justice stand out to you? Why?
2. How does the Isaiah passage influence or inform your reading of these definitions?
3. In the Environmental Justice Principles which a) surprised you, b) were poignant for you, and/or c) were hard to understand? If there were any principles that were shocking, confusing, or uncomfortable for you, try to imagine the stories, realities, and voices under those statements. What might happen to motivate someone to choose this principle? In what situation could you imagine yourself speaking this principle?
4. Without referring back to this resource, write your own personal definition of Environmental Justice. Why did you choose certain words or phrases?
5. Using old magazines, construction paper, markers, glue and scissors, create a visual definition of environmental racism or of environmental justice. Try to incorporate some of the images the above definitions brought up for you.
6. If you are working in a group, have small groups of 5-7 people create a definition together. The first time, try to write a definition that includes exactly 32 words. Share the definitions in the large group. Secondly, re-create your definitions with only 16 words. Again, read these shortened versions to each other. Lastly, make a definition in 8 words and share those aloud. What essence has been distilled in this process?

God, fill us with your steadfast love as we wrestle with harsh realities. May your voice guide us in our reflections and actions.

Closing Prayer: Holy One, in all these words may we search for your word, in all these voices may be honor your in-dwelling presence, and as we go forth may we be formed more fully as you desire.

Historical Overview

Section 3. Historical Overview

Opening Prayer: God of our past, present, and future, may we look for the movement of your spirit throughout the history of this movement.

Scripture: Luke 8:22-24

Read Historical Overview (page 8)

For Reflection and Action

1. What are other examples you can think of where the exploitation of people has been linked to the exploitation of the land?
2. Having read the past and present of the environmental justice movement, how does the story of Jesus calming the raging waves help you to imagine the future of the movement, and your (or your church's) role in that movement?
3. Discuss what parts of your lifestyle might contribute to the problem of environmental injustice and how you might change them. When we flush the toilet, drive our cars, throw away household toxins, and put recycling and trash on the curb, the pollution and garbage ends up near someone else's home, school, or work place.

Closing Prayer: Bless us as we seek to understand our place in this history in your creation. May we have faith in your ability and sense to follow your guidance in rebuking the storms around us.

Section 4. Biblical and Theological Reflections

Opening Prayer: Gracious God, enliven in us a sense of your call to us, and your will for us. As we read your Word, speak to us that we might have a word to share with others.

Scripture: Psalm 4

Read Biblical and Theological Reflections (page 11)

For Reflection and Action

- 1) Where else in scripture do you read about the relationship between God and the non-human parts of God's creation?
- 2) Where are other examples from the Bible of a concern for poor or oppressed people?
- 3) How would you answer someone who asks you why Christians should care about these issues?
- 4) Pick one of the Environmental Justice Principles to follow. Discuss why this principle is important to you.
- 5) Choose one of the "Action Steps" to do within the next six months.

Closing Prayer: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, guide us in our commitment so that by our choices, actions, and words we might glorify you and bring justice to all your creation. Help us to trust that you can use whatever gifts and strengths we might offer in protecting and caring for your creation.

Action Steps

Both educating about the issue at hand and advocating for change are necessary components in working for Environmental Justice. Contact information and resources to help you complete these steps are listed in the Recommended Resources section of this resource.

Steps Toward Education

- Talk with your neighborhood ministry associations and other social service groups to learn about environmental justice organizations in your community.
- Partner with a local environmental justice organization to host a toxic tour for the congregation or to lead a potluck dinner discussion on environmental racism.
- Study your city, town, or rural area by mapping 1) demographics 2) environmental health concerns reported 3) zoning/development laws. Notice if there are any correlations between demographics of race and class and what zoning/development is allowed in certain parts of town.
- Contact your regional EPA office about leading an Environmental Justice workshop either for your church or for an ecumenical group.
- Attend community meetings about proposed siting/development projects. Pay attention to: the demographics of the community, the actual or potential impact on the community's environment and health, the degree to which the affected community was meaningfully involved in the decision making process, and what benefits and burdens (direct and indirect) will result from the proposed action (who benefits, who bears the burden.)²

- Focus a worship service on caring for all God's creation (all people, all creatures, all the earth), with particular attention to environmental racism and justice.
- Lead a study series in your church or community using this resource. Or, use one of the recommended resources listed in the next section, to get a fuller sense of individual stories, community organizations, and overall history of the movement.

Steps Toward Advocacy

- Participate in local, state, and national legislation that concern environmental justice such as zoning, siting, permitting, housing, environmental laws. Become informed of the issues; ask questions; share your concerns.
- Write letters to the editor of your local paper about what you have learned about environmental racism and justice and how it relates to your local community. Use concrete examples, share personal stories, or ask for more coverage of such stories.

Both educating about the issue at hand and advocating for change are necessary components in working for Environmental Justice.

- Write letters to members of congress to advocate for policies that place tighter controls and stricter penalties on polluting companies and facilities. Demand that those companies be forced to show conclusive evidence that their processes and products are not causing damage to the people and land immediately surrounding their facilities.
- Write letters to ask for better regulation and enforcement of policies and laws by EPA and more funding for the branches that work on environmental justice.
- Partner with a local Environmental Justice organization in one of their actions, such as a picket, protest, or community forum.
- Take soil/water/air quality samples in various parts of town- have them tested- compare the results with the demographics of the neighborhood from which they were taken.
- Spread the word about Environmental Justice. Write an article for your denominational publication; invite other churches and/or neighborhood ministry organizations to join you in learning about and acting on these issues.
- If you are part of a national or global denomination, request more statements, resources, or actions on environmental racism and justice.

There is power in the act of defining. It determines how the world sees, understands, and responds to that which is being defined. Variances in definition and a diversity of voices are key to fully understanding the complexities and layers of environmental injustice.

Resources

Books

Karen Baker-Fletcher. *Sisters of Dust, Sisters of Spirit: Womanist Wordings on God and Creation*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

Luke W. Cole and Sheila R. Foster. *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001.)

Dieter Hessel and Larry Rasmussen, editors. *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church's Response*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

Print and Video Resources

God's Earth, Our Home. This ecumenical study packet includes worship and theological resources, program suggestions for congregations and individuals, and educational materials on a variety of environmental and economic concerns such as climate change, biodiversity, environmental racism, hunger. www.pcusa.org/environment/resources

Shantilal Bhagat, *Your Health and the Environment: A Christian Perspective*. (A Study/Action Guide for Congregations.) Call 800-762-0968 and ask for order number EJ-9760.

Hazardous Waste, Race, and the Environment (1995 Presbyterian Church USA General Assembly policy). Focuses on toxic waste and race and suggests steps that both individual Presbyterians and the PC(USA) at large may take to respond to this issue. Amends sections of the policy statement entitled "Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice," approved by the 202nd General Assembly (1990). www.pcusa.org/environment/resources

And Justice for All. This 24-minute video introduces Presbyterian church policy on environmental racism and the prevalence of toxic pollution in poorer communities, frequently populated by people of color. www.pcusa.org/environment/resources

Race, Poverty, and the Environment magazine, produced twice a year by Urban Habitat and the California Rural Legal Assistance Foundation (CRLA). Order on-line at <http://urbanhabitat.org/Publications.htm>

Web Resources and Organizations

To gather health, poverty, and race statistics for Environmental Justice Purposes:

The National Center for Health Statistics: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/gis.htm> and U.S. Census Bureau (poverty research) <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty.html>. Environmental Defense: www.scorecard.org.

The Environmental Justice Resource Center at Clark University: <http://www.ejrc.cau.edu/>

This resource center was formed in 1994 to serve as a research, policy, and information clearinghouse on issues related to environmental justice, race and the environment, civil rights, facility siting, land use planning, brownfields, transportation equity, suburban sprawl, and Smart Growth.

Deep South Center for Environmental Justice at Xavier University. <http://www.xula.edu/dscej/> The Deep South Center provides opportunities for communities, scientific researchers and decision makers to promote the rights of all people to be free from environmental harm as it impacts health, jobs, housing, education, and a general quality of life.

Environmental Protection Agency www.epa.gov, Ariel Rios Building, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20460. 202-272-0167

Office of Environmental Justice <http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/>
Toll free: 800-962-6215
Email: environmental-justice-epa@epa.gov

National Environmental Justice Advisory Council of the EPA:
<http://www.epa.gov/compliance/environmentaljustice/nejac/>

Executive Order 12898 <http://www.epa.gov/fedsite/eo12898.htm>

Regional Offices: <http://www.epa.gov/epahome/comments.htm>

National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Working Group www.nccecojustice.org
For resources, denominational contact people, and Earth Day Sunday worship materials.

¹The Hebrew words translated “to till and to keep” have also been interpreted to mean serve, till, work, and worship.

² Recommended tools for analysis raised in a regional EPA workshop on Environmental Justice held in San Francisco, CA on April 29, 2004.