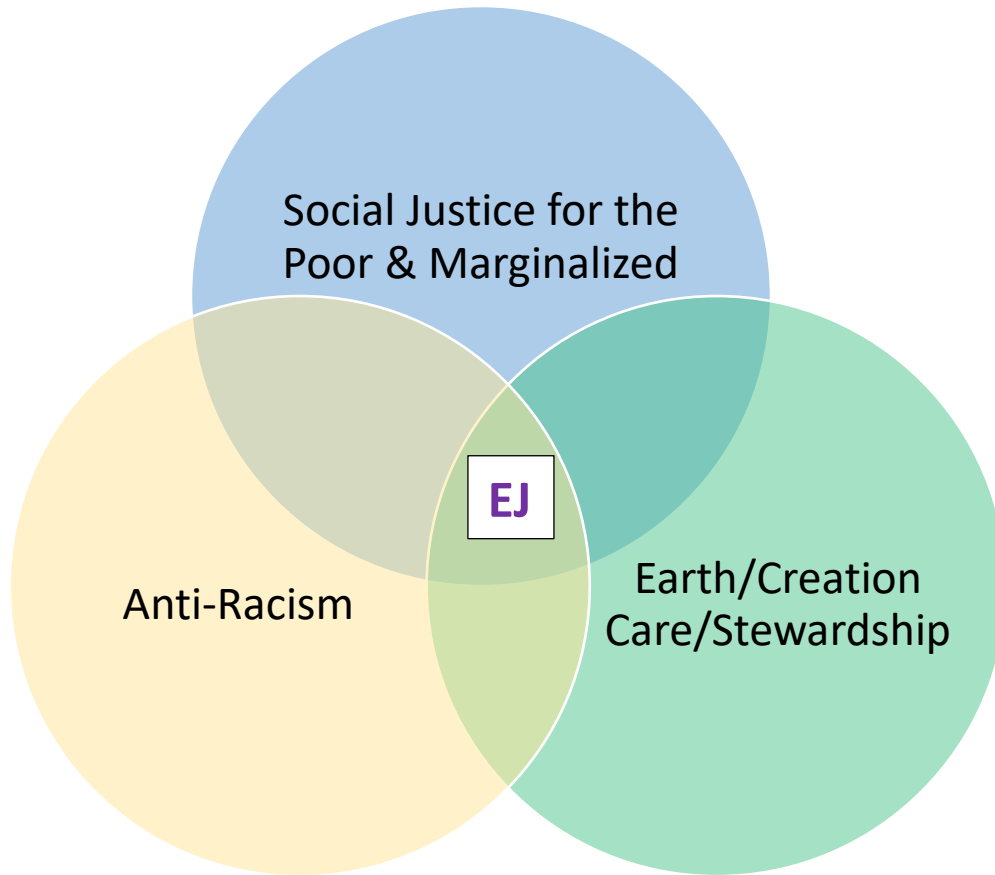


Do (Environmental) Justice
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Acts II Adult Education
First Presbyterian Church Santa Fe
July 16, 2023

Overview

This class session explores what it means for Christians to actively seek environmental justice.



Environmental Justice

Environmental justice (EJ) is about the fair treatment of all peoples, regardless of race, ethnicity, or income, in environmental laws, policies, and conditions.

There are many dimensions of EJ issues:

- unequal exposure of low-income people & people of color to air & water pollution & to toxic chemicals;
- poor & unequal enforcement of environmental laws;
- industrial facilities, toxic & solid waste sites, & contaminated lands (brownfields) in or near low-income communities of color;
- both formal & practical barriers to the participation & influence of low-income people of color in environmental decision making & governance;
- inequitably less & worst environmental benefits for low-income communities of color, such as parks, trees, & restored streams;
- related inequities in fields such as land use, energy, water, natural resources, food, climate, & health;
- climate injustice, disaster injustice, & unequal vulnerabilities & adaptive capacities (resilience injustice);
- community organizing, activism, & advocacy; and
- the systemic causes & outcomes of environmental injustice & need for systemic change.

Resources: Readings

1. Dorceta E. Taylor, *The Rise of the American Environmental Conservation Movement: Power, Privilege, and Environmental Protection* (Duke University Press 2016).
2. Dorceta E. Taylor, *Toxic Communities: Environmental Racism, Industrial Pollution, and Residential Mobility* (New York University Press 2014).
3. Julie Sze, *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger* (University of California Press 2020).
4. Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Harvard University Press 2011).
5. Dina Gilio-Whitaker, *As Long As Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice from Colonization to Standing Rock* (Beacon Press 2019).
6. Michael Méndez, *Climate Change from the Streets: How Conflict and Collaboration Strengthen the Environmental Justice Movement* (Yale University Press 2020).
7. Craig Anthony (Tony) Arnold, *Fair and Healthy Land Use: Environmental Justice and Planning* (American Planning Association 2007).
8. Craig Anthony (Tony) Arnold, Frank Bencomo-Suarez, Pierce Stevenson, Elijah Beau Eisert, Henna Khan, Rachel Utz, and Rebecca Wells-Gonzalez, "Justice, Resilience, and Disruptive Histories: A South Florida Case Study," 34(2) *Colorado Environmental Law Journal* __ (Spring 2023), Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4304128>
9. Craig Anthony (Tony) Arnold et al., "Resilience Justice and Community-Based Green and Blue Infrastructure," 45(3) *William & Mary Environmental Law and Policy Review* 665-737 (2021), Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3799314>
10. Craig Anthony (Tony) Arnold et al., "Resilience Justice and Urban Water Planning," 52(5) *Seton Hall Law Review* 1399-1459 (2022), Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4167206>
11. Emmanuel Frimpong Boamah and Craig Anthony (Tony) Arnold, "Assemblages of Inequalities and Resilience Ideologies in Urban Planning," in Arnold, Powell, Fosl, and Rothstein, eds., *Racial Justice in American Land Use*, (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

The Parable of Three Congregations

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”
Micah 6:8 (NRSV).

There were 3 different congregations, each of which met for study and prayer to ask “Lord Jesus, what does it mean to do justice, love our neighbors, and care for your creation?”

Congregation #1 heard about major threats to the environmental conditions of Majestic Mountain from mining, oil and gas production, and land development. Majestic Mountain is a beautiful and ecologically important place that many members of the congregation visit to hike, fish, camp, and stay in a new vacation resort. The members of Congregation #1 wrote letters to federal, state, and local officials to support the designation of Majestic Mountain as a National Park so that it would be protected from resource extraction for the public to enjoy. Congregation #1 also learned about the general health and environmental impacts of air pollution from industries, power plants, and vehicles, which the members of Congregation #1 worried would harm their children and grandchildren. These members of Congregation #1 joined an organization advocating for stronger air-quality regulations. And Congregation #1 learned that a series of disasters in a far-away state – a major flood followed by a major heat wave, both of which killed and displaced hundreds of people – was likely caused by climate change. Congregation #1 decided to retrofit its church buildings with a lot of energy-saving technology that would decrease Congregation #1’s contribution to greenhouse gases and to add a rain garden on the church property that would reduce the risk of flooding to the church buildings.

Congregation #2 heard about major threats to the environmental conditions of Majestic Mountain from mining, oil and gas production, and land development too. But Congregation #2 also learned that Majestic Mountain is considered a sacred place to a Native American Tribe, and therefore Congregation #2 invited tribal leaders to speak at Congregation #2’s church about the Tribe’s struggle to protect Majestic Mountain for spiritual, cultural, and ecological reasons. Congregation #2 also learned about the general health and environmental impacts of air pollution from industries, power plants, and vehicles, but some members of

Congregation #2 discovered that air pollution disproportionately harms residents of low-income Black and Latino communities, especially children. Congregation #2's Sunday School class on Anti-Racism added a unit on environmental racism and injustice so that everyone could learn more about the systemic racism behind these pollution and health inequalities. And Congregation #2 learned that a series of disasters in a far-away state – a major flood followed by a major heat wave, both of which killed and displaced hundreds of people – was likely caused by climate change. The members of Congregation #2 gathered donations of bottled waters, fans, and used clothes, which they sent with a mission team of youth and adults from Congregation #2. The mission team traveled to the far-away state to deliver the aid and help the disaster victims for a few days. The mission team learned that most of the disaster victims were low-income immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, and South Central Asia. Congregation #2 added a unit on Climate Justice to its Anti-Racism class.

Congregation #3 arranged with tribal leaders to travel to Majestic Mountain and meet with them about their concerns and needs regarding conservation of Majestic Mountain. Then, Congregation #3 joined a coalition of policy advocates seeking government protection of Majestic Mountain that prioritizes the land's spiritual, cultural, and ecological values as a sacred space for the Native American tribe, with public use being secondary, limited, and respectful of tribal uses of the land. Congregation #3 also organized a set of Sunday School class sessions on environmental racism and injustice so that everyone could learn more about the systemic racism behind air-pollution and health inequalities, including effects on low-income Black and Latino communities. However, Congregation #3 used their education to become partners with several grassroots community-based environmental-justice groups to seek stronger government regulations that take into account the cumulative impacts of pollution on marginalized neighborhoods and to seek changes to local land-use planning and regulation in order to keep polluting facilities out of these neighborhoods. When Congregation #3 learned that a series of disasters in a far-away state – a major flood followed by a major heat wave, both of which killed and displaced hundreds of people – was likely caused by climate change and disproportionately affected low-income immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa, and South Central Asia, Congregation #3 reached out to community groups in the affected area. They learned that while community residents wanted projects that would restore local streams and wetlands and plant more trees and native vegetation in order to mitigate both floods and heat,

the community residents were concerned that this would stimulate gentrification of their neighborhoods and displacement due to rising housing costs. Congregation #3 decided to partner with community residents, local churches, and local environmental-justice and housing advocates to create and fund a community-based Green and Affordable Housing Trust. The Trust created internships for youth in these far-away marginalized immigrant neighborhoods. Five years later, one of the interns received an offer to spend two years as a Climate Justice Fellow in Haiti working on long-term climate-justice strategies. Congregation #3 was asked to fund half of this young person's Climate Justice Fellowship. Congregation #3 had a spirited and difficult discussion about whether it should instead be spending its mission funds on its own young people or in its local community, but congregational leaders decided that the global nature of environmental and climate injustices make youth in far-away places and Haitians affected by climate change their neighbors. Congregation #3 now supports environmental-justice efforts in its own local communities, the Green and Affordable Housing Trust in a far-away state, and a Climate Justice Fellow in Haiti. Congregation #3 has also retrofitted its church buildings with a lot of energy-saving technology that decrease Congregation #3's contribution to greenhouse gases.

Which of the 3 congregations did justice, loved its neighbors, and cared for God's creation?

Lessons from the Parable

- Other-focused humility, instead of self-focused control.
- Become educated about environmental injustices (including their causes & effects), but also act to seek transformative justice. Learning without action & change is self-serving.
- Bottom-up empowerment, not top-down charity.
- EJ requires a “trans-everything” perspective – working across “divides” in our world, our thinking, & our actions:
- Example: local EJ; EJ in far-away places; global EJ.
- Example: the people & communities who are struggling against unequal exposure to pollution are also struggling for climate justice, affordable housing, health equity, more parks & trees, & so many other related conditions.
- It’s a long, continuing journey; remain steadfast.
- Congregations must play key roles in the struggle for environmental justice.

In What Ways Could/Should FPCSF Do Environmental Justice?

1. Partner with grassroots groups in low-income neighborhoods of color to join them in their anti-racism & anti-oppression struggle against unhealthy & inequitable environmental conditions & for healthy & equitable environmental conditions.
 - a) Local
 - b) Far-away but in the US
 - c) Far-away outside the US
2. Partner with indigenous groups against continuing colonial violence against their lands, waters, and peoples.
 - a) Local
 - b) Far-away but in the US
 - c) Far-away outside the US
3. Support regulations, laws, and policies that address environmental injustices, not just the ones that benefit you.
 - a) Local
 - b) Far-away but in the US
 - c) Far-away outside the US
4. Contribute to climate justice – not only by reducing your contribution to climate change but also by collaborating with marginalized & vulnerable communities to build their resilience and adaptive capacities.
 - a) Local
 - b) Far-away but in the US
 - c) Far-away outside the US
5. Financially support young people who are working for environmental, climate, and resilience justice.
 - a) Local
 - b) Far-away but in the US
 - c) Far-away outside the US

Where to Begin?

- The Santa Fe Southside community's struggle against environmental injustices (e.g., asphalt permit).
- Helping to connect Southside youth to nature, parks, & outdoors recreation & learning. Implement & expand the impact of the NM Outdoor Equity Fund.
- The Caja del Rio (local) and Oak Flat (Arizona): not only cleanups & education but also activism.
- Support (as an ally, partner) the struggle of St. James Parish, LA, to remedy nearly 2 centuries of environmental racism.
- Fund marginalized students at the University of Louisville to work with the Resilience Justice Project to build equitable adaptation to climate change and grassroots transformations of neighborhood environments in low-income communities of color throughout the US.
- Support climate-adaptive indigenous agricultural practices in Africa against corporate-industrial agricultural forces.
- Legal & regulatory action:
 - Cumulative impacts analysis in permitting (especially air pollution permits): Guidance; Regulations; Legislation.
 - Regulation of PFAS ("forever chemicals").
 - Implementation of Justice40.
 - Permitting & environmental-impact process "reforms"; locations & impacts of "clean energy" projects.
 - Environmental Justice for All Act.

Resources: Denominations & Faith Groups

- <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/environment/environmental-issues/environmental-racism-justice/>
- <https://www.earth-keepers.org/ecological-justice/>
- <https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/faithful-action-ministries/environmental-justice-ministries/>
- <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/environmental-justice-program>
- <https://firstulou.org/justice/solar-array/>
- <https://www.creationjustice.org/about.html>
- <https://www.umcjustice.org/what-we-care-about/environmental-justice>
- <https://www.naltblackchurch.com/environment/index.html>
- <https://www.lutheranworld.org/blog/climate-justice-when-church-speaks-people-listen>
- <http://weact.nyc/Coalitions/FaithLeadersforEnvironmentalJustice/tabid/360/Default.aspx>
- <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/20022023/cancer-alley-louisiana-environmental-justice-black-women-faith/>
- <https://www.mennoniteusa.org/news/mc-usa-hires-climate-justice-intern/>



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