



## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST MINISTRY FOR EARTH

### ENVIRONMENT & JUSTICE GREEN PAPER 3

#### IDENTIFYING ISSUES, BECOMING PARTNERS

Unitarian Universalists are growing in their understanding that matters of justice and environment are inseparable, but still we find it difficult to identify opportunities for building Earth justice in our personal and congregational lives. UUs and their congregations are hungry for tools and skills recognize Earth justice issues in our communities. Also, we are mindful of the need to work in respectful collaboration with diverse groups within our towns, states, and nation to address recognized injustices and welcome tools to guide our relationship building. This *Green Paper* offers some lenses for looking at the issues that engage and concern your community and your congregation. These "lenses" or dimensions of justice are tools that can help you to see where justice and environmental issues intersect. *Paper 3* also offers some tools to help us ensure that as we broaden our Earth justice work beyond our congregation we are mindful of good practices.

#### IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUILDING JUSTICE

For the past few decades, a general understanding of what is meant by justice has been grounded in the theories of John Rawls, who focused on the distribution of goods and services in a society and the best principles by which to distribute those goods and services. His ideas came to be known as *distributive justice*.

Today, environmental equity can be thought of as the environmental version of Rawls' distributive justice. The concept of environmental equity was first outlined in a 1993 paper, "Waste and Racism: A Stacked Deck?" when Robert Bullard identified three lenses, what he called "equity issues" - geographical, social, and procedural- for weighing matters of justice. These equity issues can be useful to us in looking for the Earth justice implications of an environmental issue in which we are considering engaging.

#### ***Geographical equity***

Some neighborhoods, communities, classes or countries receive direct benefits, such as goods, jobs, and tax revenues from industrial production and commercial activities while the costs, such as the burdens of

#### ***On Shrimp Farming....***

*It is a brutal process by which the protein is extracted from the poor people and the land which is owned by the poor people and this extraction is to feed the bloated stomachs of the rich. This is certainly a violation of the right to life. -- Jacob Raj, Indonesia*

waste disposal or degradation or re-allocation of natural resources, are borne by others. This is the type of problem that initially triggered the naming of environmental justice as an issue in the 1970s. Geographical equity remains a major component of global environmental justice issues, including climate disruption and global food production.

As one global example, consider shrimp farming. Throughout the world, shrimp farming further impoverishes already poor people by monopolizing what were once shared resources – water, land, rice paddies, and wild shrimp fry - all have been privatized for the profit and culinary delight of relatively

wealthy consumers in the North. In many places, fields and coastal waters that once supported millions of people have been claimed by industrial aquaculture, fenced with razor wire, contaminated, and when thoroughly contaminated, abandoned - unusable.

Ecological space or the ecological footprint is an important new aspect of geographical equity ( and generational equity, discussed below). Ecological footprint analysis is used to calculate the land area needed to sustain human consumption and absorb its ensuing wastes. When a population's footprint is smaller than available biocapacity, it is sustainable. The ecologically productive land "available" to each person on Earth has decreased steadily over the last century. The 2009 total world ecological footprint is 6.42 global acres per capita.<sup>1</sup> Presently, Bangladesh has the lowest ecological footprint of 1.24 acres while the United States has a footprint of 22.3 acres or five times the carrying capacity of Earth. These figures make it easy to see how the equitable use of nature's resources are directly tied with matters of justice on a global scale.

### ***Social Inequity:***

Environmental decisions often mirror the power arrangements of larger society and reflect the still-existing racial and class biases in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Institutional racism and classism have influenced the siting of noxious facilities and allowed many disadvantaged communities to become "sacrifice zones." In addition, lack of enforcement of existing laws and regulations and global corporate policies in these situations is also often directly linked to racism and classism.

As an example of social inequity, consider the Native American nations who have been disproportionately and inequitably impacted by the use of nuclear materials. From the mining of uranium, to nuclear testing, to waste disposal Native peoples and their environment have suffered. Much of the uranium mined during the cold war came from Navajo lands and employed Navajo miners who earned much less than the national norm and worked without the usual enforcement of safety standards employed in mining operations. Large tailing piles with radiation contamination were left throughout the reservation, and radioactive water was discharged from the operations and subsequently contaminated wells and water tables. Lung cancer rates are double the national average for those living near the tailings, and organ cancer for Navajo teens is seventeen times the national average. Shoshone lands in Nevada were used for many years as nuclear test sites, and most recently it was proposed to site the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste dump on Shoshone lands. The Shoshone, too, suffer disproportionate nuclear-related diseases.

In another type of social inequity, impacts on poor and/or indigenous communities result from environmental devastation such as drought, erosion, or flooding. These impacts lead to loss of homelands and forced migrations, famine, disease, etc. This is both a global problem, especially in non-industrialized nations, and a local problem in U.S. communities. A major concern about the effects of climate change is that millions of environmental refugees will be created, leading to further impacts as they crowd into refugee camps and devastate open lands and waterways. This dimension of social inequity is a cornerstone of the recent and rapidly growing *climate justice* movement, the subject of a future *Green Paper*.

### ***Participatory or Procedural equity***

Democratic and participatory decision-making processes are an element of and a condition for justice. Justice depends upon not only participation in a political or governmental context, but also upon access to full participation in a variety of social and cultural institutions. As political scientist Nancy Fraser notes:

*"When patterns of disrespect and disesteem are institutionalized, for example, in law, social welfare, medicine, public education, and/or the social practices and group mores that structure everyday interaction, they impede parity of participation, just as surely as do distributive inequities."*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Global Footprint Network, 2009. [Data and Results](#). See "2009 Data Tables."

<sup>2</sup> Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation" in Grethe B. Peterson (ed.), *The Tanner Lectures on Human values*, Vol. 19. 1998: 28.

Procedural injustice can encompass a variety of practices that tend to preclude access to decision-making and enforcement processes for individuals and groups who are not favored in the power structures of the community. It can involve "stacking" boards and commissions with pro-business interests while excluding environmental and social justice advocates (remember Vice President Richard Cheney's Energy Task Force in 2001?); holding hearings in remote locations to minimize public participation; failing to use local information media in ethnic communities to publicize information about pending decisions; using English-only material to communicate to non-English speaking communities to publicize impending public involvement opportunities; and other such exclusionary tactics.

Procedural inequity may also involve uneven enforcement of existing laws, rules, and regulations to the benefit of powerful businesses, groups and institutions and to the detriment of unempowered communities. We see this blatantly in the case of mountain top removal coal mining, where the decisions of the coal companies to use the cheapest and easiest mining process has detrimental impacts on anyone who lives in the surrounding area as well as regional environments. Laws governing water quality and toxic waste are ignored or unenforced, and the definitions of what constitutes negative impacts are changed without consultation with those who are impacted. Reasonable use of private property belonging to affected local residents is trumped by the power of the coal companies.

Procedural justice became a centerpiece of the December 2009 Copenhagen Climate Summit when thousands of registered participants were denied access to the conference venue. Fifty NGOs wrote an open letter to the UN organizers stating: "It is unacceptable that civil society observers should be limited in this forum." The letter was a graphic symbol of the growing role that global grassroots movements are playing in the arenas of justice and environment, and it voiced the notion that, "If civil society voices are marginalized now, then they will be marginalized in the final outcome."



Since 1993 when Bullard identified geographical, social, and inequity as forms of injustice, grassroots movements around the world, as well as environmental ethicists and scholars, have introduced two additional dimensions of equity to the already complex smorgasbord of approaches to justice and environment. The concepts of generational equity and species equity are expanding the meaning of justice as it relates directly to the environmental crises facing Earth today:

[CC photo: america.gov](http://america.gov)

**Generational equity:** We now understand as never before that our communities stretch over time, not just space. Decisions and accompanying environmental impacts made with a priority on short-term economic interests do not sufficiently recognize impacts that will occur over time. Generational equity requires an intergenerational sense of equal opportunity. In the spirit of Native American consideration for the "seventh generation," our decisions should not diminish the capabilities of future generations. We are the first human generation with an awareness that our behaviors and actions have the potential to end or substantially change life for the generations that will follow us. In building justice for today, it is increasingly clear that we must consider the impact of our decisions and choices upon the ability of future generations to fulfill their capabilities.

### ***Species equity:***

Many people on Earth are speaking to a larger community of justice, one that includes other species. Contemporary human societies tend to be anthropocentric; that is, we see the world solely in terms of human significance, remaining largely unaware of the value of non-human species and their right to exist without unnecessary degradation by human action. Economic analyses minimize the intrinsic value of nature so that human needs are always primary. But as long as humans see ourselves as separate and outside of a relationship with non-human living beings, we cannot recognize how the mistreatment and loss of other species ultimately affects our own mental and physical well-being and survival.



Photo: Jeff Kubina

Aldo Leopold's "land ethic" (1949) began to expand our sense of our moral community. More recently others have posited that any concept of justice must include the nonhuman world. The standard criticism to this is that it put nature on an equal moral footing with humans, but to give *consideration* to nonhuman beings as a matter of justice does not necessarily suggest an implied moral equality. It does, however, suggest that both sentient and non-sentient forms of life have moral standing. In his book, "A Theory of Ecological Justice", Brian Baxter of the University of Dundee suggests amending our understanding of justice to include what he calls, "impartiality". He writes:

*"What the amended version of justice as impartiality, which admits nonhuman nature to the community of justice, can plausibly aim for is to push moral thinking in a certain direction – one which requires the interests of nonhuman nature to be considered in human policy-making, which underpins constitutional provision for this, and which allows human interests to trump those of nonhuman nature only under certain fairly stringent conditions."*<sup>3</sup>

The implication is important. It means that the application of justice also includes a guarantee of consideration of nonhuman living nature in human applications of distributive justice.

These dimensions of justice: geographical equity, social equity, procedural equity, generational equity, and species equity are measuring sticks that Unitarian Universalists can use to help them identify the justice implications of a given environmental issue. Schlosberg, in his *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature*, highlights the three necessary ingredients in any justice work, whether related to social or environmental concerns. One, which he calls "participation" is similar, if not identical, to the idea of procedural justice above. The two additional "ingredients" he describes are *recognition* and *capabilities*. These, too, are tools that can help us to discern the justice implications of any given issue or situation, and they are useful to Unitarian Universalists in helping us discern more fully how our UU principles apply.

### ***Recognition***

There are key reasons why some people get more "goods" or "bads" than others. A main reason is the lack of recognition of both individual and group differences. Political philosopher Iris Young argues, "*where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those group differences in order to undermine oppression.*"<sup>4</sup> Lack of recognition renders people invisible; subjects them to the disrespect of insults, degradations, and devaluation at both the individual and cultural level; and reinforces patterns of domination and oppression. It can be argued that justice starts with equal recognition and respect.

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<sup>3</sup> Baxter, *A Theory of Ecological Justice*. 2005: 124.

<sup>4</sup> Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. 1990, 3.

Some examples will help to illustrate the importance of both group and individual recognition to the implementation of justice. Physicist, philosopher, environmental activist, and eco-feminist Vandana Shiva's work is a continual reminder that many cultures are defined by their particular local diet. The globalization of the food supply in a way that does not recognize and respect these traditional practices destroys local production and marketing practices and cultural identity suffers

Shiva points out that one of agri-business Monsanto's major interests is in killing weeds, many of which are an essential part of the food supply in South Asia and Africa. She writes:

*"In Indian agriculture, women use up to 150 different species of plants (which the biotech industry would call weeds) as medicine, food, or fodder.*



CC"Tuvalu" World Wildlife Fund.

*For the poorest, this biodiversity is the most important resource for survival. In West Bengal, 124 'weed' species collected from rice fields have economic importance for local farmers. In a Tanzanian village, over 80 percent of the vegetable dishes are prepared from uncultivated plants. Herbicides such as Roundup (sold by Monsanto) and the transgenic crops engineered to withstand them therefore destroy the economies of the poorest, especially women. What is a weed for Monsanto is a medicinal plant or food for rural people."<sup>5</sup>*

Native American activist Winona La Duke points to EPA standard limits on the level of dioxin released into waterways by paper mills as a clear example of failure of recognition. The standard is based on average American fish consumption, and thus fails to acknowledge the Native American dependence on subsistence fishing that exposes Native peoples to much higher toxic levels.

Cora Tucker, a well-known African-American activist once attended a town board meeting with all-male members where she was addressed by them as 'Cora' while white women were addressed as 'Mrs. So-and-So'. Cora later reported, 'I said, "What did you call me?" He said, "Cora", and I said, "The name is Mrs. Tucker" and I had the floor..... Its not that – I mean its not like you've got to call me Mrs. Tucker, but it was the respect.'<sup>6</sup>

### **Capabilities and Functioning**

The work of Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, and Martha Nussbaum, Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, the dimensions of justice even further. For Sen justice involves not only the amount of the goods we get (distribution), but how those goods can increase our capability to translate those goods into the functioning of human life. He regards a central measure of justice as not just how much we have, but whether we have what is *necessary to enable a more fully functioning life, as we choose to live it*. He suggests that the essential capabilities a

<sup>5</sup> Shiva, Vandana. *Stolen Harvest*. 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Krauss, "Women of Color on the Frontline" in Bullard (ed.) *Unequal Protection: Environmental Justice and Communities of Color*, 1994: 267.

person must possess to enable his or her own functioning include: political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees, and protective security.

Nussbaum in 2000 suggested a more comprehensive list of the basic capabilities necessary for human well-being (and, thus, justice) to flourish.<sup>7</sup> They include many of the elements we envisioned as part of a just and sustainable future in the *Introduction* to the Green Papers, and they certainly resonate with the vision of the Earth Charter.

Nussbaum's capabilities include, in abbreviated form:

- Living to the end of a normal span of human life
- Possessing good health, including reproductive health; nourishment; adequate shelter
- Moving about freely with security from bodily harm; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and reproductive choice
- Being able to use the senses; exercising freedom of imagination and expression and freedom of religion
- Being able to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger;
- Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life
- Being able to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in social interaction and be free to practice empathy and compassion; having the capability for both justice and friendship. Being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others.
- Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
- Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
- Being able to participate effectively in political choices, to own and control property, and to hold employment on an equal basis with others.

*The central measure of justice is not just how much we have, but whether we have what is necessary to enable a more fully functioning life, as we choose to live it.*

Chances are that more than one of these dimensions or "ingredients" will be present in any given issue of environmental concern as well as in any social concern. Critically examining issues and condition in our communities, states, nations and across the globe, for the absence of these these conditions necessary for justice to "flourish" can help us recognize where our energies can best be directed to build Earth justice. For practice, let's look at a very successful example of Earth justice from the Hopedale UU Community in Oxford OH and see which dimensions apply. Here is the story:

### **Reversing Air pollution problems at the AK Steel Company of Middletown, OH**

Hopedale UU Community, Oxford OH

Between 2003-2005, the Green Sanctuary Committee of the Hopedale UU Community (HUUC) of Butler County, Ohio sought to have the AK Steel Company of Middletown, OH, recognize injustices resulting from its failure to control air pollution problems at its plant, just east of Oxford and Hamilton. The AK Steel facility had been known since its inception as a major source of gaseous pollutants, particulates (soot), and toxic runoff into a nearby stream, Dick's Creek. Modest corrective steps had been taken some years ago, but no control measures or clean-up had been discussed recently.

Over time, three local environmental groups, Environmental Community Action (ECO), Ohio Citizen Action, and the local Sierra Club had organized a campaign to persuade AK Steel to install pollution controls and remove local off-site risks. After a Hopedale member appeared at a hearing regarding

<sup>7</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. 2000: 78-80

extension of AK's deep-well injection permit for hazardous liquid wastes, HUUC joined in the pollution abatement effort with a focus on the long-standing PCB contamination of Dick's Creek adjacent to the Amanda Elementary School.

Hopedale members participated in strategy sessions at three EPA hearings in Middletown (on one occasion their comments were chosen for broadcast on commercial TV), and provided support for a mail campaign. After Middletown activists/residents Ray Agee and Kim Coombs were invited to speak to at a Sunday service and told about AK Steel issues in their community, highlighting the convoluted route necessary for communications with the steel company, hundreds of letters went to the AK President. This letter-writing campaign contributed to this president's termination, the installation of a new CEO, and instructions from the Board of Directors to improve community relationships. The Middletown activists, including a member from HUUC attended and spoke at an AK Board of Directors/Stockholders meeting in Chicago, led by the new CEO, where they began a new relationship.

With the new CEO in place, a series of positive outcomes took shape. First, AK installed a chain link fence to limit exposure of the Amanda School children from the PCB contamination in Dick's Creek and began site remediation. Secondly, the new CEO Wainscott visited in the home of Ray Agee along with representatives of the Sierra Club, ECO, and others living near the mill. And finally, \$55 million is being spent to clean up AK's manufacturing processes so as to reduce particulate emissions and improve health, and restore visibility. Aside from the remediation, one HUUC member, Chris Parker has developed and led on-site gardening exercises for the students at Amanda School, introducing these children to the concept of social justice and to the hope that comes with sharing a vision of environmental recovery and implementing it.

What aspects of the Hopedale story touch on the idea of geographical equity? The communities neighboring the AK Steel factory were sharing disproportionately in the "bads" of the company's activities even though they may have also been sharing some of the "goods" in terms of employment, services from taxes, etc. Certainly the children in the school situated on Dick's Creek were at a geographical disadvantage.

Regarding, social equity we don't have enough information to determine whether racism or classism were at play, but we know from decades of environmental justice work that this is likely in many communities where polluting industries abut neighborhoods.

Procedural injustice is definitely present in this story. There was sporadic enforcement of pollution controls, access to the company's management was so "convoluted" and management so unresponsive to community concerns that the president of the company was fired. A large degree of procedural justice was achieved when residents of the community attended EPA hearings and spoke at a shareholders meeting.

Recognition is a key element in this story. The Hopedale congregation gave recognition when it invited members of the community to speak to them directly about their problems. Recognition was made in a major way when the new CEO of AK Steel personally went to visit members of the affected community in their homes near the mill. This put real faces and real stories into plain view and the affected people became visible in their own landscape.

Capability was enhanced as the church member, Chris Parker, helped the children learn that change and problem solving and healing of the Earth were possible and that they could choose to help make it happen.

The UU Ministry for Earth perspective on Earth Justice introduced *Green Paper 2* concludes by saying that Earth Justice, " Works in respectful, collaborative relationships to create the largest impact." The Hopedale UU Community clearly succeeds as a model for engaged Earth Justice collaboration through the relationships they build with three locally-affiliated environmental groups and members of the affected community. Working collaboratively in this fashion is how UU congregations can best build a bridge between environment and justice.

Some UU congregations are consciously seeking an opportunity to do Earth justice work to fulfill that component of the requirements for Green Sanctuary certification. The dimensions of justice described above can serve as tools for evaluating and brainstorming projects for this Green Sanctuary requirement. But in addition, all congregations can use the concept discussed above as as tools *to identify the Earth justice dimensions of their work in the larger world*. To consider both the social justice and the environmental components of any issue is to truly, "bend the moral arc of the universe towards justice."<sup>8</sup>

## WORKING TOGETHER

Once a group or congregation has located the places in their community where justice and environmental justice issues intersect, what comes next? These suggestions from former UUMFE Director of Environmental Ministry, Rev. Katherine Jesch give some starting points:

1. Discern which issue(s) that you have identified will arouse and engage your congregation or group to take action.
2. Discern what communities are affected? Are these communities disadvantaged or oppressed in some way? Are any of the *isms* (racial, class, gender, etc) a factor contributing to some form of injustice? What other species are affected?
3. How are the identified communities affected? (Interview residents, community leaders, workers)
4. What public policies, decision processes apply? Is *procedural justice* present?
5. What are the technical aspects of the issue (background study: books, videos, news articles, field trip, local advocacy groups, local agencies, etc.)?
6. What are possible responses? (What does the community want? Local officials? Advocacy groups? Are there other locations with the same problem?)
7. Are there other advocates or groups already working on the issue? (How effective? Successes or roadblocks?)
8. What role could you play? (Congregation's interests, capacity, resources, expertise, limitations?)

At heart, Earth Justice is about building bridges between the needs of real people struggling with real problems and the critical need to protect the Earth's living systems which support human life. The work of building these bridges is necessarily collaborative work. It will require us to collaborate with other races, classes, ethnicities, political views, religions, and divergent perspectives. As Unitarian Universalists we approach and engage with likely partners mindful of our seventh principles, but sometimes, through no fault of our own, insecure about or unaware of the experiences and values of those with whom we wish to work. Here are two resources to guide us in working together.

At the Second People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in October of 2002, a clear statement of "[Principles of Working Together](#)" was adopted. These Principles lay out the expectations of national and international People of Color and are essential reading for those seeking Earth Justice. The Principles address core values, building relationships, addressing differences, leadership, participation, resolving conflict, fundraising, and accountability.

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<sup>8</sup> "In 1961, Martin Luther King paraphrased 19th century Unitarian preacher Theodore Parker, who once said, "The arc of the universe is long but it bends towards justice."



Hobbs Farm

### **HOBBS FARM – A MODEL EARTH JUSTICE PROJECT**

Hobbs Farm is a 13-acre historically African-American- owned farm in central Suffolk County, New York. The Hobbs family came to Long Island from Alabama in 1906 and grew farm vegetables for local Long Islanders for 3 generations. In 1996 the farm was left to the Bethel AME Church, a very small Christian congregation in Setauket NY near the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Stoney Brook. AME struggled with what to do with the property and found it difficult to shoulder the financial tax burdens that the property represented. Bethel's Hobbs Farm dilemma came to the attention of UUFSB in 2005, just as UUFSB was getting started with its Green Sanctuary program. Along with the Long Island Interfaith Community and the Long Island Heifer Project representative, UUFSB immediately saw the tremendous possibilities for an Earth Justice project involving the farm. The project encompassed many worthy goals, including the preservation of open space, providing a source of local, organic vegetables for lower income people and preserving an important piece of local black history. UUFSB members attended work parties at the farm to help Bethel clean up the property, including a dilapidated barn and a small gutted farmhouse. UUFSB's Social Action raised over \$2,000 for the farm.

The increased activity on the property attracted interest in the surrounding community. Meetings regarding the farm began to be attended by people representing neighbors, civic groups, other Interfaith groups, and the principal of a nearby elementary school as well as town legislators.

In 2008-2009, approximately 2 acres of the property was planted. Local businesses provided labor for fixing the house and materials to improve the farm. UUFSB members helped with the planting, weeding, harvesting and fundraising along with many other Interfaith groups. An estimated 20,000 pounds of chemical free vegetables was delivered to local soup kitchens and pantries. Everyone says that this amount of harvest is a miracle on such few acres. In 2009 the Township of Brookhaven has made a bid to buy the property to keep it a farm, honoring Albert Hobbs' vision.

One effective model for long-term justice work is that of Community-Based Organizing (known among faith communities as Faith-based Community Organizing or Congregation-Based Community Organizing). This model is very adaptable to Earth Justice work. The Unitarian Universalist Association and the

UUA Office for Congregational Advocacy have created a useful resource, "[Congregational-Based Community Organizing: A Social Justice Approach to Revitalizing Congregational Life](#)" which guides congregations wishing to join with other faith-based communities to build justice. Perhaps of particular use to UUs wishing to engage in Earth justice work is the discussion of "What Gets in the Way of Effective Justice Work," which helps us consider what we need to discover and reconcile about ourselves to genuinely engage in multicultural, multiracial, and interfaith work. It is a reality that Unitarian Universalism is firmly planted in the white, middle-class, thus as UU congregations:

- We frequently lack relationships within the broader, diverse communities in which we live.
- We often fail to acknowledge our communal self-interest in pursuing solutions to the problems of poverty and systemic oppression.
- We sometimes lack the commitment within our congregations to pursue Earth justice

- We focus on short-term solutions instead of long-term change.
- Our commitment to freedom of conscience is sometimes threatened when social action requires that a congregation take a position on social issues.

Humans are social beings. Each of us needs to feel that we are a part of a community, that we belong to something bigger than ourselves. We need to trust that the connections are genuine, that we are valued, that we are not alone. Reaching out to the larger community; taking risks to meet others where they are; inviting others into our own midst; this is the starting place for that quest. Our quest for a more just and sustainable world depends on these connections. Earth justice is not an individual or solitary project. We can no more create justice by ourselves than we can be in a marriage along, or play a string quartet with only our own violin. Earth justice is a collective endeavor.

Earth justice requires an extended understanding of many, often quite complex, facets of an issue before we can design an appropriate response. For any issue, there will be complicated technical aspects requiring certain expertise. There will also be social aspects requiring understanding of who is affected by the problem, who benefits from the status quo, and what forces may be in play for or against change. You will also want to identify potential allies within the affected community and who, if anyone, is already working on the issue. All of this requires building relationships in the affected and adjacent communities.

Often the biggest barrier to an effective project is our own assumption about what the affected community wants or needs to solve the problem. Without shared experience, or at least stories from those with the experience, we can't know precisely what the problem is or how they would choose to fix it. If we try to design a solution without the involvement of the victims, we are solving a different problem. If we think we know the solution before we listen to their perspective, we often can't hear what they need us to know about the problem, and we could end up going in the wrong direction. So it is essential that we:

- Focus on social change, not on band aids.
- Work across race and class lines.
- Include indigenous organizations and leaders.
- Encourage diversity with ongoing outreach and training.
- Focus on connections between local and national issues.
- Develop and maintain personal empowerment while working for organizational power.
- Be flexible and ready to create new models to adapt to the needs and leadership styles of participants.
- Be open to new ideas as we bring more people on board and be willing to find ways to accommodate their ideas.

*"The special obligation of religious leaders, clergy and lay, in these times is to cultivate a renewed celebration of spirit within creation, a sense of awe, respect, humane pace, and appreciation of the wisdom of long-standing communities, and an ethic of justice, generosity; and caring for vulnerable people, creatures, and ecosystems. Otherwise, many more people will suffer from environmental degradation and social injustice, while numerous special places and wondrous otherkind are obliterated. During the next few decades the church faces a clear choice: either give in to the humanly induced decreation, or participate in the ecological reformation to restore creation while seeking human well-being on this planet."*<sup>9</sup> In other words, it is our responsibility as Unitarian Universalists to build Earth Justice.

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<sup>9</sup> Hessel, Dieter and Rasmussen, Larry, editors. 2001. "The Church Ecologically Reformed", *Earth Habitat: Eco-Injustice and the Church's Response*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 204-205.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

1. How would you define *justice*?
2. Do racism and/or other *isms* and environmental issues intersect in your community, state or region? Who is working at this intersection? Who remains voiceless when environmental issues or solutions are raised? How might you collaborate?
3. How have you experienced any or all of the five forms of inequity outlined in this paper - geographical, social, generational, species, and procedural? What actions in your personal and congregational life can you imagine taking in response to these injustices?
4. Has this chapter changed your understanding of justice work? If so, in what ways? Has it also changed your understanding of environmental work?

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