

GA-1520
(Sense-of-the-Assembly)
CONCERNING ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

WHEREAS, environmental racism is an affliction where communities comprised of predominantly persons of color and/or low-income people are adversely affected by governmental, institutional, or industrial practices or policies that either negatively affect or withhold the benefits of clean air, water, soil, or natural spaces; and

WHEREAS environmental justice has been researched since the 1980's and contemporary studies show that it is easy to predict the placement of hazardous waste facilities¹, the creation of food deserts², and the lack of natural space³ by looking at the concentration of minority and low-income areas across the country; and

WHEREAS, the afflicted communities, primarily those of racial minorities, lack local representation or national protection; and

WHEREAS, these communities are made victims of environmental racism's various forms, including: greater probability of exposure to environmental hazards, uneven negative impacts from environmental procedures and policies, targeting and zoning of toxic facilities, segregation of minority workers in hazardous jobs, little access to or insufficient maintenance of natural spaces, and disproportionate access to environmental services;⁴ and

WHEREAS, Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, refers to the entire cosmos as God's sacred creation and calls followers of Christ to care for creation and care for neighbors; and

WHEREAS, Jesus preached compassion to all people, and tasked us, his followers, with ministering to and caring for all persons in all communities (Acts 10:15); and

WHEREAS, General Assemblies of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) since the 1969 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Seattle, WA,⁵ have adopted resolutions and reports affirming the responsibility of the followers of Christ to pro-reconciliation/anti-racism⁶; and

¹ Bullard, Robert, Paul Mohai, Robin Saha, and Beverly Wright. "Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty 1987—2007 A Report Prepared for the United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries." <http://bit.ly/1DAD4w1>

² Bower, Kelly, Roland Thorpe, Charles Rohde, and Darrel Gaskin. "The Intersection of Neighborhood Racial Segregation, Poverty, and Urbanicity and Its Impact on Food Store Availability in the United States." <http://bit.ly/1FDOam0>

³ Wolch, Jennifer, Jason Byrne, and Joshua Newell. "Urban Green Space, Public Health, and Environmental Justice: The Challenge of Making Cities 'just Green Enough'." <http://bit.ly/1am9Y7M>

⁴ Taylor, Dorceta, "Environmental Racism" <http://www.pollutionissues.com>

⁵ Resolution 6919

⁶ <http://bit.ly/1baBOol>

WHEREAS, General Assemblies of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) since the 1971 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Louisville, KY have adopted resolutions and reports affirming the responsibility of the followers of Christ to care for God's creation⁷; and

WHEREAS, in the Spring of 2012, a number of ministry leaders⁸, along with our church-wide pro-reconciliation/anti-racism initiative, agreed that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) should focus collaborative efforts around four major areas including care for creation; and

WHEREAS, environmental racism brings together matters that concern the people of God: the stewardship of God's earthly creation, the dignity of the human person, God's preferential option for the poor, the affirmation of community and the desire for the common good, and fairness and equitable treatment for all children of God;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada, meeting in Columbus, Ohio, July 18-22, 2015, invites and encourages all Disciples' congregations, organizations, ministries and institutions to address environmental racism in their communities through research and education,⁹ thoughtful engagement and prayerful action; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that all members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada are encouraged to support national, state or provincial legislation which prevents the further marginalization of people from their community; and

FINALLY, BE IT RESOLVED that congregations, ministries, organizations and institutions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will diligently strive to faithfully care for all of God's creation and work for justice for all of God's people.

Green Chalice, A Partnership Ministry of
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kentucky and Disciples Home Missions

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Kentucky
Pro-Reconciliation/Anti-Racism Team

Supported by:
Disciples Justice Action Network

⁷ <http://bit.ly/1IStR5n>

⁸ Justice Table Participants: Mark Anderson, Ken Brooker Langston, Julia Brown Karimu, Jinsuk Chun, Ron Degges, Patricia Donahoo, Timothy James, April Johnson, Huberto Pimentel, Sharon Watkins, And Robert Welsh.

⁹ To research the location of dirty energy and waste facilities in your area, visit the Energy Justice Network at <http://www.energyjustice.net/map>. To connect with your state affiliate, visit the Interfaith Power and Light at <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/about/state>. Learn more about environmental justice from National Resources Defense Council at <http://on.nrdc.org/1yC6LNh>

Additional Information

Environmental racism has been the subject of a growing number of academic studies. In one such study, commissioned by the United Church of Christ in 2007¹⁰, it is reported that racial disparities in the distribution of hazardous wastes are greater now than ever before. The study's analysis of census data from the year 2000 revealed that most people who live within three kilometers of one of our nation's 413 commercial hazardous waste facilities are identified as racial and ethnic minorities. While studies such as these report that three out of five African Americans and Hispanics and approximately 50 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans live in communities containing at least one uncontrolled toxic waste site,¹¹ the adverse effects of environmental racism are not limited to the placement of these facilities. This affliction is felt in the dearth of affordable grocery stores with healthy foods and fresh produce.¹² It is felt by children who grow up without access to parks and natural spaces, vital for physical, public,¹³ emotional and spiritual health.¹⁴

While this is a cause for the concern and action of all compassionate citizens, it is a particularly powerful issue for those of the Christian faith. Since the work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1960's, the Christian Church has dedicated itself to addressing racism wherever it exists in our society and our institutions. This is in keeping with our faithful mission, as Jesus taught in the Parable of the Good Samaritan and elsewhere, to care for all our neighbors, regardless of race, income, or life circumstances. It is becoming clear that, in caring for our neighbor, we must repair creation on which we all depend for life.

Given the systemic reality of environmental racism in the United States, taking action to address it will have widespread effects. It will empower disadvantaged people to take back their communities. It will improve physical, emotional and spiritual health and the financial burdens that come with such hardships. It will help keep families in their homes and neighborhoods. Congregations across the United States and Canada can take action by:

- researching the pervasiveness of environmental racism in their area;
- joining creation, racial and economic justice movements;

¹⁰ Cf. "Toxic Wastes and Race at Twenty 1987—2007 A Report Prepared for the United Church of Christ Justice & Witness Ministries," cited above.

¹¹ Checker, Melissa. "Race-ing the Environment." *Polluted Promises Environmental Racism and the Search for Justice in a Southern Town*. New York: New York UP, 2005. 13. Print.

¹² In addition to previous citations, please see the following for more information: Beaulac, Julie, Elizabeth Kristjansson, and Steven Cummins. "A Systematic Review of Food Deserts, 1966-2007." *Preventing Chronic Disease*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 15 July 2009. Web. 8 Feb. 2015. <http://1.usa.gov/1Hg56y3>

¹³ Cf. "Urban Green Space, Public Health, and Environmental Justice: The Challenge of Making Cities 'just Green Enough'," cited above.

¹⁴ Louv, Richard. *The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder*: Algonquin Books. 2012. Print.

- funding and supporting creation, racial and economic justice work in organizations and academic institutions;
- lobbying state/provincial and federal elected officials for stronger enforcement of environmental standards and petitioning for new legislation designed to address the affliction of affected communities; and
- supporting and voting for candidates sensitive to and supportive of creation, racial, and economic justice.

United Church of Christ: <http://bit.ly/1CUwSel>

Other resources include:

Association of American Geographers: <http://bit.ly/1Hjb7ujege.pdf>

Energy Justice Network: <http://www.ejnet.org/ej/>

Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism: An Annotated Bibliography and General Overview, Focusing on U.S. Literature, 1996-2002. <http://bit.ly/1PYnAai>

**The General Board recommends that the General Assembly
ADOPT GA-1520. (Discussion time: 12 minutes)**