



## Commit2Respond: Moral Imperative for Climate Justice

By Irene Keim, UU Ministry for Earth Board Chair, UU Church in the Pines, Weeki Wachee, FL

The Commit2Respond campaign is testimony to what can happen when thoughtful people work together to call for action based on UU values. A call from the Environmental Justice Collaboratory gathering organized by UUMFE in 2014 helped inspire responses that grew into an action-filled and cooperative campaign.

Commit2Respond, started just one year ago, is a collaboration of nine sponsoring UU organizations (1) and many more endorsing organizations, congregations and individuals. All answered the call to embody the moral imperative of climate justice and pledged to invest 'time, talent and treasure' to address the impacts of climate change in our midst. Here is a list of some of the exciting actions in this inaugural year of the campaign.

### Public Witness and Partnerships

We showed up for the People's Climate March last September – the largest denominational contingent in the event. Many more groups organized coordinating local events

We witnessed with the Lummi Nation at a Sacred Public Witness event at General Assembly in June and supported a Totem Pole Journey linking Indigenous peoples and religious communities

across the West to help preserve the treaty rights and sacred lands and waters in the face of fossil fuel facilities expansions.

We formed new relationships by hosting climate justice conferences in partnership with interfaith and community organizations in our

home regions. For example, UU Justice Florida participated in an inaugural interfaith conference on climate justice advocacy last spring and will participate again in 2016. The Northwest UU Justice Network held the 4th Annual Justice Summit and scheduled the 5th Annual session for Oct. 10, 2015.

We took a collective stand by passing an Action of Immediate

Witness (AIW) resolution on climate change at General Assembly. The AIW is titled, "Support a Strong, Compassionate Global Climate Agreement in 2015: Act for a Livable Climate." This AIW is a call to bring a focus on the justice component of our climate change actions. Building upon the AIW, the UUs for Social Justice in the National Capital Region (UUSJ) delivered a letter from the UUA President Rev. Peter Morales to the U.S. Special Envoy for Climate Change with the calls for a strong, compassionate cont'd on page 3



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### ABOUT UUMFE

Unitarian Universalist  
Ministry for Earth is a non-  
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supporters envision a world  
in which reverence,  
gratitude, and care for the  
living Earth is central to  
the lives of all people. As  
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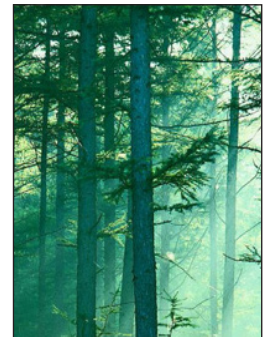
## Message From the Board Chair

### Beyond the Catchy Phrase

A slogan or a book title is meant to be quickly engaging. For example: “Keep It In the Ground” (The Guardian), “Kick the Carbon Habit” (Audubon), Change the Story, Change the Future (David Korten), and This Changes Everything (Naomi Klein). These are like rallying cries for those of us working for climate justice – end fossil fuel use and begin a new way of being in community. So here is our challenge. How do we move beyond the phrases and into the deeper work of fostering real change? Ah, you say; that is a good question.

We can bolster our moral commitments by reading wise authors and listening carefully to our visionary leaders and learning more about issues. We can binge-read websites filled with information, many re-stating facts that we already learned or justifications that we have parsed and pondered. Some lift our spirits, some send us into despair, and some inspire us to make lists of possible actions or next-steps. Some really impact our emotions with beautiful, poetic words, angry outbursts, or tedious details.

At times, I can be overloaded with all of the riches these words present. I can become frozen in the abundance of challenges and possibilities. The most effective antidote I have found is to just take that next step into the work – to do something, however insignificant the action may seem. And, if I really want a boost, the next step needs to include connection with other people who are looking for companions for the work. This tactic seems so simple, but it can be incredibly effective – not profound – just effective. Effective in helping to engage again; effective in going deeper into the work of moving change along a just path.



Edward (E.O.) Wilson, the biologist and author, has been involved in a discussion of ‘group selection’ for several years. It goes like this: “Groups of altruistically inclined individuals have an evolutionary advantage over groups that are composed of members pursuing only their own survival needs.”(1) So, not only does group activity help to get out of a slump, it may have a magnifying effect on the good works. Makes me think of the familiar hymn, ‘One More Step’ which moves with the lovely rhythm of a waltz. Dancing while changing the story – now that is an image to bring out smiles and a newfound energy.

*In gratitude for community, Irene Keim* ♦

(1) Richard Schiffman, “Bigger Than Science, Bigger Than Religion,” *YES! Magazine*, Spring 2015

cont'd from page 1  
accord at the UN Climate Agreement Talks in Paris in December 2015. A UU delegation will be attending the Talks.

### Faithful Grounding

We strengthened our spiritual grounding and resolve during the first-ever Climate Justice Month, from World Water Day (March 22) through Earth Day (April 22). The 2015 resources developed for the month are all available on the Commit2Respond.org website and will be enhanced for 2016.

### Advocacy Training

We expanded our learning through more than twenty climate justice workshops at the 2015 General Assembly. If you were an attendee and did not get to all of the workshops, you can listen to the recorded sessions online. The Public Witness with the Lummi Nation is available for all to view on the UUA.org/GA webpages.

We grew new leadership via a multigenerational service-learning trip to a frontline Indigenous community and a five-day climate justice training for young adults. Check out the reflection by a participant on the Commit2Respond.org blog pages.

We also **donated needed funds** for three campaigns:

- \$14,000 to counter fossil fuels transport impacts on Indigenous communities;
- \$16,000 for young adult climate justice activism; and
- \$17,000 to help communities in California and Kenya protect their human right to water.

And more . . . We invite all who are seeking to work for a more just response to climate change to join the campaign. Please add your stories to the Commit2Respond website and check out other inspiring news items on the websites of the sponsoring and endorsing organizations. See other articles in this newsletter for activities in the coming church year including a week of Moral Action for Climate Justice in Washington, D.C. coinciding with the visit of Pope Francis to the

United States. ♦

(1) Commit2Respond Sponsoring Organizations:

- Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM)
- Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA)
- Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA)
- UU College of Social Justice (UUCSJ)
- UU Environmental Justice Collaboratory (UUEJC)
- UU Ministers Association (UUMA)
- UU Ministry for Earth (UUMFE)
- Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)
- UU Young Adults for Climate Justice (UUYACJ)



*Congratulations to Matthew McHale! Last year he coordinated the continuing work of the task teams established at the 2014 EcoJustice Collaboratory – funded by a generous grant to UU Ministry for Earth from the Cedar Tree Foundation.*



## Nurturing Nature: Letting the Beauty We Love Be What We Do

*By Rev. Dr. LoraKim Joyner, Multispecies Minister at the Community UU Congregation, White Plains, NY; Wildlife Veterinarian; Director of One Earth Conservation and Ministry; and participant in the UUA/UUMA Entrepreneurial Ministry Program (all photos from her project in Honduras)*

Climate change is real, as are the loss of biodiversity, extinction, and the devastating impacts of ecological collapse and violence on the biotic community. I've worked for 28 years on the front line of conservation, and I've experienced this tragedy first hand. But there is something else I have learned; beauty is everywhere, and it weaves every living thing in a web of worth and belonging. By being so nurtured in beauty and belonging, I believe that we humans can face, if not with certainty, then with resilience and even joy, the challenges of keeping our biotic communities healthy when they are under threat from so many powerful forces. Nurtured ourselves, we in turn can nurture all of nature.

This is my calling as a Unitarian Universalist minister and wildlife veterinarian – nurturing nature, ours, yours, theirs, the Earth's. I approach this deeply meaningful work by knowing that the health of each individual is inextricably interrelated – we are one Earth, and one health.

I heard this same sentiment expressed by Tomás, an indigenous leader of the Miskito people



in Honduras. I was there to witness and stand in solidarity with the villages that wish to resist the overwhelming

forces that seek to extract their trees, steal their wild parrots for the illegal wildlife trade, take their

land, and impose violence, corruption, and the drug trade as a way of life.

Tomás stood up to these forces that were destroying his ancestral lands. For his efforts, he made enemies who ambushed him one day, and he was shot four times. He nearly died. His whole village had to flee because they were likewise threatened with their lives.



Yet, four months later he returned to the ghost-like village to work with me and others on parrot conservation. We had to hire a squad of soldiers from the Honduran military to accompany us and keep us safe. I asked him why he was willing to risk his life. He replied, "Doctora, everything is at risk so I am willing to risk everything. If the parrots don't make it, neither do my people."

Tomás's wisdom resonates with what I have experienced as minister and veterinarian; to save ourselves, we must save all beings. For that reason, I continue to work with Tomás's village and have started an organization, One Earth Conservation. I am developing it with the help of many volunteers, mostly Unitarian Universalists, and the UU Entrepreneurial Ministry program, in which I was selected to participate.

One Earth has conservation projects in several countries, seeking to nurture people who choose to take a stand against the loss of Earth's beauty and health. We are also developing a Nurture Nature Program that consists of workshops, videos, small group ministry materials, presentations, an online community, and Meet Up groups that seek to nurture and guide those who cherish and preserve this one earth and Earth's beings.

In Nurture Nature workshops, we invite participants to a lifelong discovery of nature accompanied by practice and discipline that that will provide resources and resilience for living compassionately. By accepting our own inner

animal, our compassion spreads outrageously beyond kin and kind to all of life. We also build community and foster relationships through slowing down, sharing experiences, and co-designing activities that nourish us and all of nature.

In workshops you will have the chance to learn, practice, and discuss concrete foundations upon which individuals can build on over time through the Nurture Nature Program or on their own. These foundations draw on science, psychology, communication theory and practices, and various spiritual and religious approaches such as Albert Schweitzer's Reverence for Life ethic and a variety of mindfulness practices.

If you'd like to be nurtured, and nurture nature, please join us. You can find out more by going to <http://www.onearthconservation.org>. I'd love to hold a workshop at your congregation and we are actively seeking participating congregations and organizations to host these.

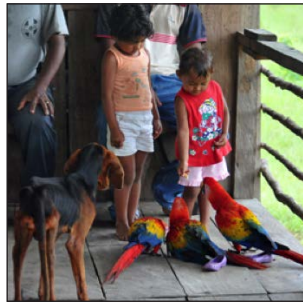
If you'd like to help Tomás and his people, we are currently raising funds for a Wild Parrot Rescue Center in Honduras. You can go here to donate: <http://rescuecenter.mydagsite.com/>

There are many other ways to engage, and I wish this deep and vibrant life for you. As writes Sufi poet Rumi, "Let the beauty we love be what we do. There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground." ♦

## We Have a Pope

*By Rev. Earl W. Koteen, UUMFE Board,  
Berkeley Fellowship of UUs, CA*

**Y**es, I stole the title from a 2011 movie, though my meaning and the story are different. In fact, this story probably much more parallels the experience of President Eisenhower after he had appointed Earl Warren as Chief Justice. I wonder



whether the College of Cardinals knew what they were going to get when they selected Francis.

My first faculty advisor at the Starr King School for the Ministry, our UU seminary in Berkeley, was a Catholic nun. She told me that anti-papism was and probably still is the anti-Semitism of UUism. Goddess knows we are pretty damn far apart on marriage equality, reproductive justice, and a number of other issues. Yet even though Galileo's trial was nearly 500 years ago, many UUs still have no clue about the relationship between science and the modern Catholic Church.

Though Pope Benedict lacked the charisma of Francis, he too was a champion of environmental justice. When I told UU congregations this fact and that some of my closest environmental justice allies were Catholic, it came as a newsflash.

### Diogenes' Search is Over

While I don't believe in beatification, it certainly appears to me that Pope Francis has come closer to ending Diogenes' search for an honest man than any other world leader. Though his ideas about the connections between the environmental and economic injustice are not new, it is the first time we have heard them from such a bully pulpit.



Photo of Diogenes statue in Sinope, Turkey courtesy of Creative Commons.

### Two Mystifications And One Powerful Truth

Many UUs associate mystery and mystification with faith. But mystification has become the province of political and financial elites. (Back in the day we used to call it a credibility gap.) I am very grateful that Obama has turned to take action on climate change and environmental injustice.

I don't know whether he is lying, spinning, or misinformed if he imagines that his efforts are in any way proportional to the challenge we face.

In a similar manner, I anticipate that the Paris Accords will be both insufficient and unenforceable. Insufficient in that the pace of environmental degradation will continue to outpace our efforts to slow it down. Unenforceable in the sense that these will be agreements not treaties and there is no force on the planet that can or will hold countries accountable for their agreements. It is safe to say that on an international level, we basically have anarchy.

The one powerful truth: this is not the time to believe any fossil-fueled lies; rather it is the time to redouble our efforts because they are making a difference. I want you to support the UU Ministry for Earth with your time, talent, and treasure. I want you to become more politically active and to identify the environmental justice issues and organizations in your community. You will be glad, empowered, and blessed if you do so. ♦

## The Road Through Paris and More Climate Justice News and Tools

*By Ellen McClaran, UUMFE Board, First Unitarian Church, Portland, OR*

As this newsletter goes to press, Pope Francis is arriving in the U.S. for his much anticipated visit, including addresses to Congress and the United Nations. UUs in the Washington, DC, New York, and Philadelphia regions and around the country are participating in numerous events that support the pontiff's views on the moral and justice aspects of the climate change challenge, which are very similar to ours.

The Climate Justice Movement has grown and matured tremendously this year and Pope Francis' visit is serving as a launching pad to the important work to come, particularly surrounding the climate talks at the U.N. COP21 conference in Paris. The following organizations and projects are on the

leading edge and are sure to inform and inspire future climate justice advocacy and activism in your congregation.

**350.org.** Many organizations have been using the term "the road *through* Paris" instead of "... to Paris" to indicate that there will be much more work to be done after the Paris talks than before – and 350.org has a plan (see below). UUMFE and UUs have been working with Bill McKibben and his organization since the International Day of Climate Action in Oct. 2009 through the #Forward on Climate Rally in D.C. in 2013 and many more initiatives. Many communities have local chapters and UUs are usually on the leadership teams. 350.org's newest initiative is the boldest ever.

Its basic message is: "We need a climate deal that's in line with the imperatives of science and justice. Keep 80% of fossil fuels in the ground and finance a just transition to 100% renewable energy by 2050." Go to <http://350.org/roadthroughparis/> and follow the links – sign the petition; watch

**PARIS 2015** THE PLAN FOR PARIS (AND BEYOND)

- SEP 10** KICKOFF  
"OFF+ON" STRATEGY TALK  
feat. Naomi Klein, Rev. Lennox Yearwood and Bill McKibben
- OCT 17** BUILD MOMENTUM  
"POWER THROUGH PARIS" WORKSHOPS
- NOV 28+29** MASS ACTION: PARIS + WORLDWIDE  
GLOBAL CLIMATE MARCH
- NOV 30** THE U.N. CONFERENCE  
↓  
**DEC 11** COP21: PARIS
- DEC 12** STANDING UP & FIGHTING BACK  
MASS MOBILISATION
- APRIL 2016** IT DOESN'T END WITH PARIS  
BOLD ESCALATION (details coming soon)



the video of the Sept. 10 “Off + On: the Climate Movement and the Road Through Paris” event; find a “Power Through Paris” workshop in your area, or create one; decide if now is the perfect time for you or your congregation to divest from fossil fuels; plan local support events for the mass actions in Paris before and after COP21; and watch the website for follow-up actions in the spring.

A number of other organizations have adopted the “keep fossil fuels in the ground/renewable energy” themes. Our own Commit2Respond campaign will be adopting a version of this as its focus for Climate Justice Month 2015. Periodically check the blog at <http://www.commit2respond.org/news> to keep up with what is happening. Here are some other initiatives to explore.

**Keep it in the Ground:** *Coalition of over 400 organizations and individuals ask President Obama to keep remaining unleased public fossil fuels in the ground.* (Sept. 15, 2015 letter – the UUA was a signer: <http://www.keepitintheground.org/>; article: <http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/09/15/unburnable-climate-groups-call-obama-halt-fossil-fuel-leasing>)



**Greenpeace:** *Keep It In the Ground – help end the fossil fuel era and protect our public lands.* (<http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/global-warming/keep-it-in-the-ground/>)

**Beyond Extreme Energy:** *No new permits for fossil fuel infrastructure. Renewable energy NOW.* (<http://beyondextremeenergy.org/>)

**Center for Biological Diversity and Friends of the Earth:** *Climate Study – Ending New Federal*

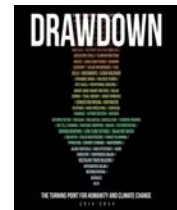
*Fossil Fuel Leases Would Keep 450 Billion Tons of Carbon Pollution in Ground.* ([http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press\\_releases/2015/greenhouse-gas-emissions-08-19-2015.html](http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/news/press_releases/2015/greenhouse-gas-emissions-08-19-2015.html))

**NextGen Climate:** *Calling on all candidates to embrace a goal of at least 50% clean or carbon-free electricity by 2030 . . . completely clean energy by 2050.* (<https://nextgenclimate.org/blog/climatechange/building-a-new-clean-energy-economy/>)

**Intrfaith Power and Light:** *Paris Pledge – Faith models deep CO2 cuts for COP21.* (Take the pledge: <http://www.parispledge.org/>)

These next two projects are solutions-oriented and provocative – should be very useful!

**Project Drawdown.** “Drawdown” refers to the point at which greenhouse gases in the atmosphere begin to decline. The brainchild of Paul Hawken and Amanda Ravenhill, this project involves a large advisory coalition of over 200 scientists, business leaders, policy-makers, volunteers, educators, and others. Their task is developing a comprehensive list of 100 “state of the shelf” solutions/strategies that create a path to carbon decline within thirty years.



The book, *Drawdown: The Turning Point for Humanity and Climate Change, 2015-2045*, will be published Spring 2016. In the meantime, explore the website at <http://www.drawdown.org/> and see the evolving solutions list at <http://www.drawdown.org/solutions/>.

**The Leap Manifesto: A Call for a Canada Based on Caring for the Earth and One Another.** Naomi Klein, David Suzuki, and others hope to change everything through this vision of a better Canada. Check out the website at <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/> and read the fifteen demands on the “sign the manifesto” page. The Manifesto has received lots of press including <http://www.commondreams.org/news/2015/09/15/now-time-boldness-naomi-klein-notable-canadians-call-system-overhaul>. Watch for the new *This Changes Everything* film. ♦

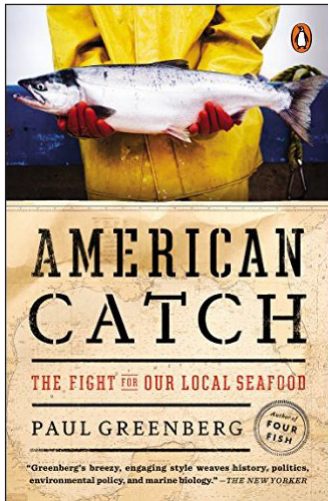
## Book Review: American Catch: The Fight for Our Local Seafood

By Bob Keim, former UUMFE Board, UU Church in the Pines, Weeki Wachee, FL

When I was young, my Grandmother taught me to fish in Florida waters. It runs in my blood; always will. So, naturally I picked up a copy of Paul Greenberg's book, American Catch: The Fight for Our Local Seafood.

What I learned affirmed and amazed me. Incisive about three seafood families: oysters, Gulf shrimp; and sockeye salmon, American Catch describes how poorly we have treated these creatures and the human communities that have harvested them, their environments, the illogical craziness of our seafood systems, and possible movements towards solutions.

The author's interest in oysters focuses on New York City, where he lives. As he asks: "Long before New York was New York, it was the Hudson River estuary. Though we moved here and made our livelihoods here, did we have to cut out the city's seafood heart? Did we have to destroy twenty-one thousand of the twenty-five thousand acres of oyster-laden salt marsh our estuary



once possessed? If you run the numbers, you find that this marsh would have been capable of producing all the seafood New York City could possibly need."

Meanwhile, Gulf shrimp are still recovering from the Deepwater Horizon disaster, with oil companies pressing for drilling permits faster with less environmental regulation. And we're importing more shrimp from Vietnam, impoverishing many

Vietnamese as aggressive mangrove clearing for shrimp farming threatens coastlines with saltwater intrusion, and poorer Vietnamese who could have used these lands to grow rice can no longer do so, nor can they afford the shrimp.

So which makes less sense: that we rampantly pollute one of the best shrimp habitats in the world or that we import them from a country where less than 2% are inspected by the FDA and production techniques destroy valuable lands?

But it is Bristol Bay and sockeye salmon that touch Greenberg the most. This area north of Alaska's peninsula "...contains one of the greatest seafood treasures of all: the biggest sockeye salmon run in the world. It generates as much as two hundred million pounds a year of some of the purest, most nutritionally rich wild protein on the planet." But now Bristol Bay is threatened by the Pebble Mine. Seen as a potential source of \$50 billion, based on potential sources of gold, copper and molybdenum that could only be moved off-site by ships passing through what was a state "Fisheries Reserve," this mine would dispose of some of the most polluted waters known to man. This is a lurking disaster that bears close watching.

Even so, "...79 percent of all Alaska salmon is exported." Americans asked why they don't want to eat fish say, "...I don't want to touch it. I don't know how to prepare it, and I don't want it smelling up my kitchen." So instead we send it frozen to Asia, then what they don't eat they thaw, prepare, package, refreeze, and send back to us. Meanwhile, seafood grown in Asia tends to be less healthy. "In the case of tilapia, instead of heart-healthy omega-3s, it is rich in omega-6s, which are not as beneficial and may in fact be harmful when consumed in large amounts. But American consumers tend to lump it together and presume that it is all basically 'good.'" It's like the old joke: we're eating the artificial crap while the real food is going overseas!

What Greenberg asks us to do is to keep our seafood here, where it belongs. "At sea everything is a miracle by comparison. All that the sea asks of



us is that we be wise in our harvest, recognize the limits of its bounty, and protect the places where seafood wealth is born. In return, the sea will feed us and make us smarter, healthier, and more resilient. Quite a covenant.”

Quite a covenant, indeed. I heartily recommend [American Catch](#). Reading it brought back days on Lake Kissimmee – when tannin waters were dark but clean, mayflies abundant, and fishing good. It’s a world we in UUMFE work to protect and preserve, and every tool is welcome. Knowing the oceans and seafood as a blessing, the urge to work for this world will grow on you. ♦

## Updates from the UU Young Adults for Climate Justice

By Aly Tharp, Network Coordinator, UU Young Adults for Climate Justice (UUYAJC), Plano, TX

**W**e go into this Fall season blessed with new foundations laid throughout a very busy summer. At UUA General Assembly this June, the UUYAJC presented three workshops and collaboratively created a six-foot tall chalice weaving together the deep love and concern of our community regarding the looming climate crises, through the public art concept of The Climate Ribbon project (<http://theclimateribbon.org>).

In July, Aly represented the UUYAJC at an interfaith gathering about peace and climate change hosted by Religions for Peace USA and the Catholic Focolare movement, in Hyde Park, New York.

August began with the *Grounded and Resilient Organizers Workshop (GROW): Climate Justice*, provided through the UU College of Social Justice, in Chicago, IL. This training was formative and important to our young adult activist community, in ways almost beyond explanation. Please read



*Participants in the Grounded and Resilient Organizers Workshop (GROW): Climate Justice. Photo by Cameron Whitten.*

this summary description of the training published on the Commit2Respond blog ([http://www.commit2respond.org/growing\\_climate\\_justice](http://www.commit2respond.org/growing_climate_justice)), and this personal reflection, “Whiteness and Apocalypse,” offered by participant and new network activist, Amelia Diehl (<http://blueboat.blogs.uua.org/2015/08/28/whiteness-and-apocalypse/>). Many attendees have already started organizing to preach as part of our 100 Services for Climate Justice challenge – bringing us up to fifteen services out of the 100 services we hope to deliver over the next two years: our contribution to building the movement, as a leading organization in the Commit2Respond campaign (<http://www.uuministryforearth.org/100-services-climate-justice-commit2respond-challenge>).

Shortly following GROW, the continental young adult gathering OPUS took place in Perrysville, Ohio. Aly Tharp and Elizabeth Mount presented two workshops, one related to cultural and arts organizing, the other one about exploring ways that activists can support each others mental, spiritual and physical health needs in our community. New connections made between Canadian and US-American young adults at OPUS were meaningful, and there is new potential for the UUYAJC network to provide its first ever climate justice centered programming in Canada. Elizabeth Mount also climbed with Greenpeace in Portland that month to stall arctic drilling by Shell Corporation. Listen to an interview between Elizabeth and Aly about this action: <http://www>.



[uuyacj.org/news--updates/direct-action-gets-the-goods-an-interview-with-elizabeth-mount-about-the-pdxvshell-shellno-aerial-blockade](http://www.uuyacj.org/news--updates/direct-action-gets-the-goods-an-interview-with-elizabeth-mount-about-the-pdxvshell-shellno-aerial-blockade).

In September, the UU Young Adults for Climate Justice took direct action, joining the Resist 450 coalition in protesting the celebration of colonization in Florida. We witnessed numerous instances where the city of St. Augustine glorified and perpetuated the racism and



bigotry of the Doctrine of Discovery, and Resist 450 intentionally disrupted the celebration through non-violent demonstrations. Read more about the actions taken and why the UUYACJ was compelled to mobilize: <http://www.uuyacj.org/news--updates/resist-450-repudiating-the-doctrine-of-discovery-through-action>. We ask that this coming October, to celebrate Indigenous Peoples Day, you help make plans to learn and grow in community regarding the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery and how the rights and leadership of Indigenous communities relates to creating climate justice in the world.

**In other news:**

Two attendees of the GROW training, activists Jimmy Betts and Lee Stewart, are currently taking part in an 18-day hunger strike outside of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) calling for no new permits for natural gas export and interstate transportation projects. Jimmy, who travels the country with a mobile-mural called "The United States of Fracking," has been coordinating the creation of a quilt that tells the stories of communities impacted by fracking, created in solidarity between fasters in D.C. and in those communities across the country. More

info: <http://beyondextremeenergy.org/september-fast-at-ferc-for-no-new-permits/> and on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/BXEAction>).

On September 15, a petition was delivered to the White House calling for the end to leasing extraction on federal public lands. The UUA, UU Food Justice Ministry, and UUYACJ were all signatories to this petition, and Tim DeChristopher spoke at a press conference in front of the White House with numerous other notable climate justice activists.

Tim DeChristopher recently co-founded a new organization focused on training climate justice organizers, called the Climate Disobedience Center. Sign up for updates: <http://www.climatedisobedience.org/join>.

Thank you for your support – onward! ♦

## What the Frack?

*By Rev. Rose Edington and Rev. Mel Hoover, UUMFE Board, UU Church of Charleston, WV (photos are from a video taken during the fracking tour described in this article – watch at <https://youtu.be/yOqMv9uwmG4>)*

**D**uring July 2015, we had the opportunity to learn more about the development of deep, horizontal fracturing for gas in West Virginia. We are Rev. Mel Hoover, UUMFE Board member and Rev. Rose Edington, Chair of the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC). Besides being life partners, we're also co-ministers emeriti of the UU Congregation in Charleston WV, and in "retirement" the founders of MelRose Ministries for Positive Transformative Change.

Because fracking is happening in many states and is being touted as an answer to our nation's security (e.g., with sufficient domestic gas, we won't need to insure access to foreign supplies), and because GA 2016 in Columbus OH is in a fracking intense state, we want to share some of the issues that came up on our fracking tour.

GA 2014 in Louisville exposed many UUs to extraction industry issues in Appalachia,

particularly to mountaintop removal mining, and how we are all implicated when certain regions of the nation become energy sacrifice zones for the convenience of turning on a light switch. And it seems with global warming we are in danger of turning our entire planet into a sacrifice zone.

We are being told that gas is not as bad as coal since it burns less carbon, or is the bridge fuel on our way to renewable or sustainable energy. But, as we have learned, there is more to consider than the availability of gas – there is also the high-risk process of getting it out of the ground and piping it to our homes or businesses.

Back in 2011 we attended the annual WV



*Tour leader Bill Hughes (R) with OVEC board members near the beginning of the tour.*

Martin Luther King community breakfast. Our current governor was the speaker, and he was excited about fracking and what it could do economically for our state. He emphasized that we are dealing with a new industry, and we had the opportunity to “get it right.” We were concerned because we wondered – get an extraction industry right? For whom? For the people and the land? For the air and the water? Or for whatever the industry wants to develop? He was a brand new Governor, and one of the stories in the press mentioned that he liked to garden and can his own green beans. We wanted to hope that with his gardening experience he might understand the need for healthy water, air, and land. We tried to have hope that he might know of some way an extraction industry could be done right, but frankly, we were

quite skeptical.

Unfortunately, our skepticism was not misplaced, as mineral rights trump surface owner rights, as pipelines with insufficient safety guarantees get laid up hill and down, as state officials get over- excited seeking to entice industry for a cracker plant in WV with no mention of its pollution, as fracking under the Ohio River is being considered, as our water gets used by industry, as wells are ruined, as trains carrying oil derail bringing danger and fear to communities, as people living near frack sites suffer from the same concerns as those living near mountaintop removal mining. We could keep on “as-ing,” and you will notice we’ve not even mentioned issues of global climate change that are worsening from the increasing amount of fuel we extract and burn.

The tide is slowly beginning to turn away from King Coal in Appalachia; however we must still continue to work with groups opposing mountaintop removal mining. We find it good, yet somehow disheartening, that environmental justice groups with long time MTR experience in organizing communities, advocating to the legislature on issues of MTR mining, suing to enforce EPA regulations, etc., positions them so very well to understand the dynamics and challenges of the latest extraction industry – deep fracking of shale for oil and natural gas.

On our fracking trip, which was organized for the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), Board members and their guests, we learned of the organizing work going on near fracking sites. Initially, this work occurred around Marcellus shale issues (fracking about 5000 feet deep) affecting most of the state. More recently, OVEC began organizing around issues of the deeper Rogersville shale (about 12,000-14,000 feet deep) located under much of southwestern WV and parts of eastern Ohio.

Our guides were Bill and Marianne Hughes. Bill coordinates OVEC’s fracking work. With our abundance of skepticism and concerns, we were glad for the opportunity to learn more and see





*The group climbs to the top of the hill to view a huge fracking facility (photo below). Mel and Rose are wearing their UUMFE t-shirts!.*

actual fracking sites. We visited sites in Wetzel and Harrison Counties in the central-north area of WV, including a wildlife management area in Wetzel County where the Department of Natural Resources, who manages the area, was told to leave it to oil and gas.

We were fortunate to have such well-informed guides to accompany and educate us about what we were seeing. One of the things we'd heard from industry's perspective is that fracking has been going on for a long time, with the implication that since it's nothing new, we should not be concerned with it. Bill explained that "it's not your grandfather's kind of fracking." The reason we're told it's nothing new is so industry can use the same regulations that were developed for the well pads of our grandparents and great-

grandparents. Besides seeing them on the tour, most of us were familiar with the old, small well pads seen here and there in rural areas. They could fit into a typical backyard garden and had minimal environmental impact. Quite a contrast to the well pads for horizontal fracking where the pad size is determined by how many acres a gas company can lease. One example Bill gave us was 4-6 wells occupying 450 acres. Just the gear needed to develop a site takes an average of 10-12 acres.

It's difficult to distill into an article the processes Bill explained to us in his presentations that took us through the production stages for Marcellus shale gas operations and the resulting problems experienced by communities. To go more in depth in this area, Bill referred us to [FracTracker.org](http://FracTracker.org), and we have found it to be an excellent resource wherever you may live. If you have consumer advocate staff in your state Department of Environmental Protection, they, too, can be a good resource.

We would like to conclude by sharing some of the things that still haunt us from our trip. They point towards environmental justice issues that need to be addressed.

Flaring is used to get rid of impurities before gas is piped. Regulations say companies are not to flare for more than 30 days. We're concerned about global warming. Thirty days seems like an awful long time to burn gas impurities. If previous owners of your property sold the mineral rights, your surface rights are diminished. After enduring



the noise and dust of establishing the well pad and drilling, you could then be living for days with a flaring well pad on your property.

Although they are different processes, there are similarities to mountaintop removal mining (MTR), which is a form of surface mining where explosives are used to blow up mountains in order to reach the seams of coal. Most fracking well pads are on mountaintops because our WV valleys are too narrow, so the top of a hill is leveled off. While it's not leveling on the same scale as MTR, it is still troubling. It also involves clear cutting of timber and pushing the dirt to the side. Part of the problem is that many of the contractors and workers for the Marcellus come to West Virginia from Oklahoma where they are used to flat land. Their method of pushing the dirt aside can lead to slippage of the well pad in WV. Both processes can be noisy. MTR has sirens and blasting. Fracking has constant, high decibel noise when the pumps are activated, at 2000hp per pump and 15-16 pumps all going at the same time.

A difference from MTR is that once the well pad is completed and all the pipes are in place, it's "prettier" on the surface than MTR, almost benign looking. There aren't acres of devastation stretching before your eyes, and it is quiet when the pumps are off. The pipes leading into the ground are color coated and look neat. Butterflies flit around them. Ironically, there are even solar panels on the well pads. But what goes on underground raises our anxiety level. Watching pipe being laid and also seeing Bill's slides of pipes being laid up hill and down in rain and mud makes us wonder about their long term stability. And who will check them to make sure they stay in place and won't rupture? And what about the earth tremors reported in Oklahoma and Ohio that sometimes happen either with the fracking process or when fracking waste is pumped deep underground?

Of course, the issues of jobs, jobs, jobs and the economy – and being attractive to industry – are what we hear as good reasons for allowing fracking in West Virginia. But it's a false economy.

During our fracking tour we stayed at a nearby hotel. In the hotel parking lot were lots of white pickup trucks with license plates from Oklahoma because more fracking jobs are going to out-of-state workers than to West Virginians. We provide restaurants and hotels to the workers, so our service industry grows – until the major work is done and the out-of-staters return home.

Whether they come from in or out of state, we are concerned about the workers and their safety, as well as concerned about the safety of those living near fracking sites and along the roads leading to them. Diesel fumes are not regulated during the actual fracking and tens of thousands of gallons are used daily. Diesel fumes also abound from the heavy trucks that turn asphalt roads to gravel. Ultra-fine particulates that can pass through the cell walls in our bodies are in diesel fuels; and no one concerned with regulations is considering their cumulative impact. There is also silica dust released during fracking. This dust is very light and easily wind born. From coal mining, we know particulate matter from silica gets into our lungs, often leading to silicosis, known as black lung disease. Rock dust is a result of air drilling used in about the first 200 feet of a frack. If you see it, you might think it is steam. Regulations call for watering down the dust, but that doesn't always happen. We keep wondering how this dirty, dangerous process could really be seen as helping the economy if we accounted for the effects on public health.

One of the surprising aspects was how



*What looks like steam rising from a fracking site is actually dangerous silica dust, i.e., glass.*

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accessible the well pads were to our tour. Some were fenced, but at other sites the pipes and holding tanks are just out there in the open – in remote locations, where people like to go hunting. It doesn't seem that it would take much for a group of good ole guys out horsing around with booze and rifles to see what would happen if they wanted to use a holding tank for target practice. Just another safety concern we wondered about.

Since we live in Charleston, WV, we were among the 300,000 people whose water was poisoned after the 2014 Freedom chemical spill into our water system. What haunts us most from our fracking trip are the water issues. In a thirsty nation and world, it makes no sense to allow grand scale pollution and waste of this life necessity. How can we even think of using a process that could damage our aquifers? How can it be that we have regulations that allow the industry to take water from public streams and springs at no expense to them and with little to no oversight? For all of us who pay water bills, this seems very unfair. How do we protect our life-giving water?

Industry assures us that we don't have to worry about aquifer contamination because everything is encased, and underground pressure prevents any seepage. But, Bill, our guide from OVEC staff, informed us that there is no way to have casing on the first drill, so a test drill, or a first drill can potentially lead to aquifer contamination.

It takes 2-8 million gallons of surface water (from rivers, streams, springs, etc.) to frack a gas well. Some take more, and a well may be fracked multiple times. An example of the amount of

water it takes is that in 2011 in Pennsylvania, Marcellus fracking used 12-20 million gallons a day. That's a lot of fresh water, much of which cannot be reused. Companies build fresh water impoundments near well pads, using our public water; then they have to create wastewater ponds (to quote Bill) "to take the crap afterwards." The "after-crap" includes radioactive waste that cannot be filtered out. If (when?) the pond leaks, or the drill cuttings from well pads reach landfills, water (leachate) can eventually get to water treatment plants, into surface streams and rivers, into the water intake and so into our drinking water. We find this outrageous!

When will we tell industry it's time to err on the side of caution and ban fracking? In our state it won't be easy because we've got 150 years of coal history and political, economic, energy, and social traditions that favor extraction industries. But we still keep wondering, hoping and agitating. We're thankful for the example from New York – if that state could ban it, why can't we?

To our WV Governor, who said we had the opportunity to get it right, we say it was an opportunity lost. You didn't help get it right for the people five years ago. Getting it right means putting a healthy environment for everyone, and the creatures, too, over the rights of industry. We urge our governor and all national and local officials who are responsible for the greater good to PLEASE look upward for energy instead of deep underground. Look up to the wind and the sun where there is plenty of healthy, wholesome energy for our needs. ♦

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