



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH All of God's Creation

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, August 13, 2023

Environmental Justice in Our Communities: A Chance to Act

“For too long, environmental racism has plagued burdened communities. Incinerators, landfills, sewage plants and the like are often built in low-income areas because the residents of these areas typically lack the clout necessary to influence decision-makers. As a result, the people in these communities are powerless to stop facilities that pollute the local environment, drive down property values, and even poison the citizens as chemicals seep into the water they drink and air they breathe.

To help address this issue, we will be introducing legislation [PA House Bill 652] that would require a more transparent and open process before certain facilities are built or expanded within areas defined as ‘burdened communities.’ [According to the PA Department of Environmental Protection, there are over 800 environmental justice areas across the state.] Builders of these facilities seeking permits would first have to prepare an environmental impact statement that includes any potential negative impacts a facility may have on the surrounding area. After the completion of this process, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection would have the power to deny a permit application if it finds that the cumulative impacts of the facility on the community would be too great to justify its approval.

The constitutional right to a clean environment is guaranteed to all, not only to those with the funding to lobby government officials. This legislation would be another step towards upholding that right....” (Memo to House members by Reps. Donna Bullock, Malcolm Kenyatta, Christopher M. Rabb, 1/18/23)

Our brothers and sisters of Our Mother of Consolation (OMC) Parish’s Laudato Si Circle decided to take the plunge into supporting PA House Bill 652 and are requesting anyone interested at Holy Cross to join them in this environmental justice effort.

There are several state bills that address environmental justice, but this one is the farthest along in the legislative process. The bill has moved out of the Environmental Resources Committee, has gone to the House floor, and was sent to the Rules Committee. The hope is that when the House session starts in September, it will be sent back to the House floor for a vote.

OMC would like to lobby elected officials to move this bill to a House vote and to vote in favor of the bill. But they need the support of others to be effective. **They are looking for contacts/supporters who can assist in developing their lobbying efforts.** Would you or someone you know be interested in helping to develop or promote this initiative?

An **OMC Climate Ministry meeting** is scheduled for **7:30 p.m. on Monday, August 14** at the OMC Parish Center at 7 Chestnut Hill Avenue, Philadelphia, 19118. If you are interested in this effort, please let **Barbara Sheehan** (sheebarb@yahoo.com) know if you can attend, **either in person or over Zoom.** (If Zoom, a link will be sent to you.)

Addressing environmental justice on a local level would help us to answer the call in Laudato Si to respond to “the cry of the poor.”