



Resolutions To Action

LCWR Global Concerns Committee

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Hope in the Face of Fracking

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I know well the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare, not for woe, plans to give you a future full of hope.” — Jeremiah 29:10-11

EXPERIENCE

“Fracking is fracturing land, families, and communities,” said Pauline Beck, one of four neighbors who joined four Sisters of the Humility of Mary (HM) to plan a town hall meeting at Villa Maria Community Center in western Pennsylvania. Her words describe the relational breakdown in rural Pulaski Township where 90% of the land is leased for hydraulic fracturing. Neighbors and former friends have opposed one another at local public hearings and in the media.

The town hall session was one of 12 public gatherings to educate ourselves and the wider community. Presenting various dimensions of horizontal hydraulic fracturing were scientists, attorneys, ethicists, farmers, university professors, community organizers, oil companies, health professionals, environmentalists, leased and unleased landowners, and persons already suffering harm.

We consulted and discerned, prayed, and deliberated. Foundational to the community’s decision not to lease the 761 acres of Villa Maria was the HM Land Ethic and Principles of Sustainability. “Understanding the consequences of our decisions, we will evaluate all potential changes to the use of the land of Villa Maria in light of this Land Ethic.” We communicated our reasons for not fracking to interested oil companies and our publics.

Committed to our mission of bringing more abundant life to God’s people, especially those who are poor, we honor the integrity of the land that welcomes all into a place of healing and hope. We remain faithful to our charism of Mary’s humility and the need for humility in today’s culture, as we seek to be a sign of hope for future generations of all species.

The majority of local landowners signed leases. Some were falsely told by the industry that the sisters had signed. Now many have regret as gas flaring and lights, noisy rigs and odors overshadow the once pastoral agricultural area. This heavy industrial operation frightens wildlife, creates acid rain, and invades the contemplative setting with convoys of

diesel trucks hauling millions of gallons of fresh water for fracking and then removing post-fracking waste.

Because a large fracking well pad lies adjacent to nature trails on our Villa property, we test our water regularly to assure its safety. Like most of our neighbors, we rely on well water for campus residents and guests numbering in the thousands annually. We did a wetlands study of our land and do ongoing air monitoring. Recently Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection posted online a list of 243 private drinking water wells contaminated by drilling.

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Much of Pennsylvania's fracking waste is taken to injection wells in nearby Ohio. One disposal site registered a 4.0 earthquake that rocked homes of Ohio residents including HM sisters. Last year Oklahoma, which has 3,300 disposal wells, suffered 567 quakes of at least a 3.0 magnitude in locations that usually have fewer than two a year.

SOCIAL ANALYSIS

Fracking not only harms land, air, and water, but also fractures the health of the whole Earth Community with interconnecting ripples of destruction. Oil and gas travel through an extensive network of pipelines to processing plants and then on for distribution.

More local communities are objecting to the laying of large cross-country networks, especially in densely populated areas. Through the right of eminent domain, energy companies can use private property for interstate pipelines. Powered by their commitment to care for the environment, the Loretto Community, along with other congregations and concerned organizations and landowners, raised a moral voice opposing the construction of the Bluegrass Pipeline through their sacred land in Kentucky. This united and hope-filled call to action met with success.

In addition to pipelines, volatile crude oil is being transported long distances in train cars. Increasing derailments in North America are causing explosions, enormous fires, and water contamination along with loss of life. Those with stock in oil and transportation companies can use their financial investments as a catalyst for hopeful change by taking a stand with others such as members of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR). Divestment from fossil fuels is not necessarily a path to change. Staying invested gives shareholders a voice.

The extreme cold of this past winter and devastating drought in the western United States are indications of climate change impacting Earth. Both flaring of methane at well sites worldwide, and burning of fossil fuel, intensify global warming.

REFLECTION

At its core, the ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis – one of alienation from our very source of life. Experiencing all life as a sacred gift deepens spiritual connections with the land and our relationship with the divine. With a cosmic worldview of wonder and awe, reverence and gratitude, the absolute priority is protecting the integrity of water, air, soil, and all Earth elements. Severe disturbance to ecological sustainability diminishes, degrades, and endangers the quality of life for all life communities.

As never before, humanity is called to learn humility, to live our truth as a species, to become our best selves within the reality of global climate change. We are called to be signs of hope, to live our faith in the face of fracking.

Cultural historian Thomas Berry, CP reminded us that primary resources such as gas and oil are one-time endowments with limited supply. Do we need to investigate the use of renewable energy for our own needs so as to be credible voices against fracking? We can be a sign of hope by the action we take, the witness we give, and the lifestyle we live.

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ACTION

Educate yourself and others on fracking issues in the United States:

- Sign up for the free environmental newsletter www.ecowatch.com.
- Support strong environmental policy by contacting state legislators and Congress.
- Oppose local ordinances and political systems that dismiss the voice of citizens.
- Attend local public meetings, advocate for justice, and communicate with the media.

Participate in actions against fracking www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/fracking/

Urge national leaders to stop the exportation of fracked U.S. gas to other countries and invest in renewable energy. www.climatenewsnetwork.net/oil-boom-prompts-us-to-push-for-crude-exports/

Subscribe to Margaret Swedish's blog at www.ecologicalhope.org.

- Meditate on the interconnectedness of all life.
- Develop compassion for those harmed by fracking.
- Help transform grief into positive actions that restore hope.
- Model a sustainable way of life in using natural resources.

Align financial investments with care for creation.

- Join the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility www.iccr.org and access fracking resources on their website.
- Participate in collaborative dialogue with corporations on environmental policies; file shareholder resolutions where appropriate.

Consult Catholic Climate Covenant

- www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/catholic-teachings/energy-statements/