



Sacred Conversation on Race The journey **continues**

O God, we pray for your presence and wisdom, as we begin to look carefully at the realities of **RACE and the **Environment**. Amen.**

The following are three stories of race and the environment.



Race and Pollution

• In 1982, the state of North Carolina chose a poor, mainly African-American community, Warren County, as the site of a toxic waste landfill to dispose of PCBs illegally dumped along the roadway of 14 counties.

The residents of Warren County, N.C., enlisted the support of the United Church of Christ (UCC) Commission for Racial Justice (CRJ) to reject this toxic landfill through a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience.

The term “environmental racism” describes the selection of certain communities as sites for toxic waste disposal and polluting industrial facilities.

Inhabited mainly by African Americans, Hispanics,

Native Americans, Asians and Pacific Islanders, farm workers and the working poor, these communities were, and still are, particularly vulnerable.



They are being perceived as weak and passive citizens who will not resist against the poisoning of their neighborhood in fear that it may harm jobs and economic survival.

• For more than 50 years until 2003, the 9,000 Puerto Ricans residents of the island Vieques lived between the U.S. Navy's live-fire bombing range on the eastern end and a vast munitions dump on the western end.

Residents complained that the Navy had stymied Vieques' economic development and damaged their environment. The Navy said it had no alternative other than Vieques to conduct critical combat training.

• More than a decade ago, an international mining company started burrowing a mile under the earth near the shores of Lake Michigan where a small Native American community lived and depended on clean water for hundreds of years.

The Keweenaw Bay indigenous community continues to fight for their clean water, sacred sites and traditional way of life as Kennecott Eagle Minerals inches towards copper and nickel extraction, scheduled to begin in 2014.



Race and Climate Change

From a racial justice point of view, climate change, caused by fossil fuel consumption of the developed world, is environmental racism.

Its global impact, as the World Council of Churches reminds us, affects communities of color and poverty first and most severely.

Environmental racism selects certain communities as toxic waste sites

Climate change impacts communities of color and poverty

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Prayerful reflection

In Luke 10:29-37, the Parable of the Good Samaritan describes how one who is outside mainstream society finds a wounded man by the roadside and helps him – at some personal cost – recover from violence against him.

The Good Samaritan is one of the defining examples of charity, a model for compassion and justice.

What if the Good Samaritan happens upon a simi-

larly wounded individual on the same road again? Help is offered again, of course! But how about a third or fourth person on the same road?

Maybe the Good Samaritan would go further up this road to see who and what is harming the vulnerable and stop them from doing so, by joining efforts with justice advocacy to change the system.

This is another defining example of justice in the

spirit of the Good Samaritan in Luke's gospel.

It is to support the advocacy energies and directions of communities of color, poor communities, and global communities. And together, we do the analysis and work to actively seeking change in our environment.

Questions for discussion

1. What does this study and prayer today on race and the environment spark in your religious imagination? Share what this evokes for you: sadness, laments, hopes, dreams.

2. A group of Georgian women, because of their funeral visit outreach in a fifty-year-old ministry of flowers and food delivery, realized a pattern of deaths related to hidden waste sites.

They ended up organizing their town, changing local and state policy, and

guiding environmental tours with intercultural allies to educate about their place and how to change and heal other places and painfully broken systems successfully.

How do the dots between race and the environment show up in your community? Think of small and big instances. Try together to “surface” as broad a picture as you can for your church, community, or region.

3. What projects and successes, in “undoing” environmental racism have you heard about,

or been involved in – locally or globally?

4. What does this study inspire for a next step in race and the environment for your local church?

For example, what local advocacy or issue for race and the environment do you want to learn about and engage?

Consider engagement with issues via creative activities in worship, outreach and mission (e.g. 2013 *Mission 4/1 Earth*).

