



THE TELLING TAKES US HOME:

TAKING OUR PLACE IN THE STORIES THAT SHAPE US

A People's Pastoral from the Catholic Committee of Appalachia

THE TELLING TAKES US HOME: TAKING OUR PLACE IN THE STORIES THAT SHAPE US

A People's Pastoral from the Catholic Committee of Appalachia



CATHOLIC COMMITTEE OF APPALACHIA
Spencer, West Virginia

The Telling Takes Us Home:
Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us
A PEOPLE'S PASTORAL FROM THE CATHOLIC COMMITTEE OF APPALACHIA

© 2015 Catholic Committee of Appalachia.

This text is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>. This license does not apply to photographs or artwork contained herein. Artwork and photographs appearing herein are used with permission and remain the property of the respective artists and photographers.

Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*, copyright © 2007 Priests for Equality. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover and interior design by Liz Pavlovic, www.lizpavlovic.com

Front and back cover art by Christopher Santer, www.christophersanter.com

Printed in the USA by Morgantown Printing & Binding, Morgantown, W.Va.

First printing, December 2015

Published by the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA)

885 Orchard Run
Spencer, WV 25276

cca@ccappal.org

www.ccappal.org

www.peoplespastoral.org

Facebook – www.facebook.com/groups/ccappalachia

Twitter – @ThisLandIsHome

Contact CCA for additional copies.

For Walter Sullivan

CONTENTS

FOREWORD: CELEBRATING THE SEED GROWING.....	1
INTRODUCTION	2
Re-membling Our History in a Changing Church.....	3
Taking Our Place in the Story	4
PART ONE	
OUR STORIES: THE GROUND OF OUR STRUGGLE	6
The Challenge of Becoming a Church of the Poor.....	7
The Magisterium of the Poor and of Earth	7
A Growing Chorus of Stories	8
The Voice of the Land.....	10
The Voices of Women.....	12
The Voices of Coalfield Residents	13
The Voices of Miners	14
The Voices of Economically Vulnerable Communities.....	16
The Voices of the Homeless and Imprisoned	18
The Voices of Communities Impacted by the Oil and Gas Industry.....	18
The Voices of People of Color.....	21
The Voices of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgendered People	23
Voices in Context: Coal, Capitalism, and Climate Change	25
PART TWO	
OUR TRADITIONS: THE GROUND OF OUR VISION.....	28
Shaped By New Stories	29
Integral Ecology and the Culture of Encounter.....	35
The Place of God’s People: Israel and Empire.....	37
Putting Jesus in His Place: The Jesus Movement in Galilee.....	40
Practicing Resurrection in Crucified Places.....	42
The Spirit, the Giver of Life.....	44
PART THREE	
OUR ACTIONS: THE GROUND OF OUR HOPE	48
Becoming Appalachian Mystic Activists	50
Transforming the Basis of Life.....	51
Transforming Communities and Economies.....	53
Transforming Politics	54
Transforming the Churches.....	55
A Message to Youth	57
Conclusion.....	58
INTERLUDE: A CERULEAN WARBLER SPEAKS	32
AFTERWORD: A NEW GENERATION’S PLACE IN THE STORY	61
NOTES.....	63
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	73

**FOREWORD:
CELEBRATING THE SEED GROWING**

As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of "This Land Is Home to Me" (1975) and the 20th anniversary of "At Home in the Web of Life" (1995), we find ourselves mourning the loss of so many who contributed to these Appalachian pastoral letters in the telling of their story, facilitating the process, or signing the documents. Such losses open us more and more to God, allowing us to let go like the seed that perishes in order to become the kernel of new life that rises again. As we engaged in conversation over a three-year period about a new letter we began to hear a seed growing: "Somewhere in the Cosmos a new redemptive reality has made a beginning and [has] become the source of new blessings."¹

When the bishops gathered at Vatican II, they described the Church as "the People of God"—not only the pope, bishops, and clergy, but the entire People of God. They further articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* how the Church was to be present in the modern world, and their key was dialogue. It is not a new thing for the Church as institution to lead and speak out on issues it chooses to take a stand on, on its own turf. It is a new thing for the Church to listen, truly listen, to what people are saying in their terms, on their turf. A listening Church listens to what might be painful such as "the burdens that women bear in a tradition that too often continues to make religion a form of female servitude."² Pope Francis speaks of the need for us to become a "messy" Church that is not afraid to take risks, thus, not afraid to acknowledge the messy realities of women's lives, realities that challenge the Church's current practices in many ways, realities that the Church must acknowledge in order to communicate the joy of the gospel to future generations. As Pope Francis himself says, "God is not afraid of new things."

Never before has the Church needed so badly the presence and pain that is the prophet in our midst, whose only criteria is faithfulness to the Spirit. Pope Francis himself pointed to Dorothy Day as a model. The Catholic Worker is, and always has been, on the margins of the institutional Church. Its wealth lies not in its bigness nor its assets. Its wealth lies elsewhere, in its faithfulness to the Gospel and to the poor. We are seeing through Pope Francis that the Spirit is much harder on us than we are. Dying implies letting go and the Church does so reluctantly. We want to hang on to what we know, as opposed to a rising that we do not know. All three pastorals are in sync with Pope Francis. "Wisdom comes from listening to the holy faithful people of God. Listen, listen with the heart. And then let us walk together."

Beth Davies, CND
St. Charles, Virginia

¹ This quote comes from Rosemary Radford Ruether's foreword to Edwina Gateley, *I Hear a Seed Growing: God of the Forest, God of the Streets* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990/2010).

² Catholic Women Speak Network, eds., *Catholic Women Speak: Bringing Our Gifts to the Table* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2015).

INTRODUCTION

Let me sing to you all those songs I know...
Come along with me to some places that I've been...
It's sad, but the telling takes me home.
—Utah Phillips'



Here in Appalachia,
we are people of stories.
These mountains have heard
the stories we tell,
and have told,
across time and space.
The mountains hold our stories,
and they have stories of their own.

Our stories are the lifeblood
that connects us to each other and to this land.
Even those who have left these hills
know the power of the telling
that connects them to home.

Yet there are stories here
that separate us from one another as well,
false stories that alienate us
from our sisters and brothers
and from Earth,
given to us as a garden.
When the story of these mountains as “resource”
takes over the story of the mountains as “home,”
we become homeless in our own place,
and disconnected from Earth and one another.²

Wherever we are,
and whatever our relationship to these hills,
telling our stories
connects us once again,
takes us home,
and gives us a place
from which we can act for justice.

RE-MEMBERING OUR HISTORY IN A CHANGING CHURCH

Forty years ago,
people of faith in Appalachia set down their story
in a pastoral letter
called “This Land is Home to Me.”
A collaboration among laity, religious, clergy,
and bishops,
that letter reflected the voices of the people
and empowered new movements for justice.
Twenty years later,



a second pastoral letter followed,
“At Home in the Web of Life,”
which spoke of creation’s interconnectedness
and the need to create a sustainable future for all.³

Both of these letters spoke boldly
from our particular place on this planet
about our belief in a God of the poor,
demanding justice and healing for God’s creation.
They spoke beyond the Catholic community,
as diverse people heard in them
the longing for justice
found in the message of Jesus
and in the struggles of the human spirit
across cultures throughout the world.

Today, the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA)
offers this third pastoral letter
as a prophetic word spoken
for new realities among us.
We recommit to reading the signs of the times,
listening to the stories
of the places and people who hurt most,
to create new paths forward
toward greater justice, peace, and wholeness
for our communities and for creation.

In this statement,
we recognize a deepening ecological crisis
and new pressures on our struggling communities.

TAKING OUR PLACE IN THE STORY

But we also offer a statement of hope,
lifting up communities, organizations,
and movements
that are pointing us toward a better way,
a message for and from youth
about the future they desire,
and a statement which calls churches
to reconnect with
local, regional, and global movements for justice.

We offer this letter in a time
of both disappointment and hope
for people of faith who seek justice.
Many Catholics have mourned as we have watched
our community stray from its focus
on social justice and peace
revived at the Second Vatican Council.
We have even felt deep betrayal
as some church leaders valued
institutional preservation
over the well-being of children abused by priests.

However, during the planning of this pastoral,
new signs of hope began to emerge.
In the United States,
the election of the first Black president,
the new visibility of women religious in public life,
new forms of progressive Evangelicalism,
and the surprise election of Pope Francis
have all given encouragement and renewed energy
to movements who believe a new world is possible.

In this bewildering but exciting time in history,
we have been reminded
by the founding members of our movement
that all of us, young and old,
must *re-member* our history
as people of faith in Appalachia,
that is, to collect the pieces of the story,
to stitch it together again,
to find our places within it,
and to retell the story for new generations.⁴

The stories we tell and pass along
help us to remember, to make sense of our lives,
and to create meaning within them.
But powerful elites tell false stories
about this world and about their communities
in the loudest of voices.
These stories reflect values
which are not in the best interest of everyday people,
especially those who are poor or vulnerable.
When powerful people in our communities,
our region, our nation, and even our church
abuse their power and tell false stories
that shape our lives and our values,
reality can be distorted and injustice grows.

But when common people retrieve the power
to tell their own stories,
profound liberation can occur.
People find liberation in telling stories of struggle,
because these stories show us
that things are not as they should be.
And people find liberation, too,
in telling stories of creativity, community, and justice,
because in them we catch glimpses of a new world.⁵

We have faith that a new world is possible
because we feel that yearning for a new world
across time and among diverse peoples.
We have faith in this new world, too,
through our belief in Jesus of Nazareth.
Jesus told stories of struggle and of hope,
parables rooted in the images
and stories of his people,
and he confirmed our hope in a new world
through his death and resurrection.
Jesus' life reveals to us the source of his hope,
the parental love of God
which makes all things possible.

And so, in this "People's Pastoral,"
the Catholic Committee of Appalachia,
along with our ecumenical friends and organizations,
offers a message inspired by our shared stories.

By lifting up the authority of these stories,
we Christians at the grassroots hope to contribute
to the growing movement
that is telling a new story about our region.

This is a pastoral message
from the people themselves
to our region,
to the world,
and to the churches,
leaders and laity alike.

There is a psalm sung in our churches,
which insists, "The Lord hears the cry of the poor."
In this People's Pastoral,
we Christians in Appalachia ask ourselves:
The Lord hears the cry of the poor, but will we?
And how will we respond?

PART ONE

OUR STORIES: THE GROUND OF OUR STRUGGLE

There are no jobs on a dead planet.

—*Judy Bonds*

We won't save places we don't love.

We can't love places we don't know.

We don't know places we haven't learned.

—*Baba Dioum, paraphrased by Ched Myers*⁶



THE CHALLENGE OF BECOMING A CHURCH OF THE POOR

Our Appalachian pastorals painted rich pictures of what it means to follow Jesus of Nazareth in this place:

- to listen to the voices of the people, especially the cry of the poor
- to give witness to the cost of humanity's destructive relationship with Earth for both local communities and the planet as a whole
- to speak a prophetic word on behalf of a struggling human and wider Earth community
- to form communities of justice and sustainability
- and to imagine, through poetry and song, new pathways forward toward God's Reign.

Forty years after the first Appalachian pastoral, we are still learning what it means to "be church" in this particular place, but we have much to celebrate. After each pastoral was released, numerous ministries, communities, and initiatives flowered throughout the region. Some were begun officially by the churches, others by grassroots communities, and still others by individual people of faith. Lay people, women religious, and clergy continue to take their place in the region to serve God's people, and creation, in the mountains. Individual Christians, too, have become involved in the region's many movements for justice.

Members of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia, and the various churches and organizations we work with, have taken our place among those who struggle, listening most closely to the voices of those most affected by the systems that crush God's people and God's creation.

Still, each of us, individually and in the communities

where we find ourselves, must pause and honestly evaluate how we are doing in responding to the call to be a "church of the poor." Can we really hear the cry of the poor, and take our place among the excluded, if befriending the poor and marginalized is uncomfortable, if we don't always like what we hear when we listen to their struggles and ideas, or if we have not begun to understand our own poverty and dependence upon the gifts of God and one another?



If we are honest, we must admit that there are still significant challenges to our ability to listen for God's voice in the very places we know it can be heard. We acknowledge the need to make deep changes in our churches and in our movements to bring down the barriers that separate people from one another.

THE MAGISTERIUM OF THE POOR AND OF EARTH

We remember and recommit to hearing the voices of the poor and of Earth and to voices we are still learning to discern. Official pronouncements and projects have not always helped us to hear these voices. But we remember the deep, Biblical truth

that the voice of God does not come from high places and halls of power but rather in the still, small voices of the least of our sisters and brothers. We believe that the voices of the poor are to be in some sense our first teachers. In fact, churches from around the world have begun to call the authority of these voices the *Magisterium of the Poor*.⁷

The first Appalachian pastoral letter spoke of the authority of the poor this way:

*[W]e must continually take time and invest creativity into listening to our people, especially the poor. For it is they who, out of their frustrations, dreams, and struggles, must lead the way for all of us.*⁸

Taking a stand with those who are poor means taking a stand, too, for Earth, for we know both are deeply connected. What we do to Earth, we do to the poor. And more, we believe, like Pope Francis, that Earth “is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor,”⁹ abused and used up in ways that do not respect its integrity and limits.



Earth itself is a kind of *magisterium* with its own authority that must be respected.¹⁰

To listen deeply to the authority of the poor and of Earth in this way, and to recognize them—using Catholic language—as *magisterium*, is not to challenge the official authorities of our churches, Catholic or otherwise, or to negate their proper functions. It is rather a recognition of the different gifts and roles among the diverse Body of Christ¹¹ and of the truth that there are authorities to which all of God’s people, including the powerful, must bow in humility and reverence.¹² This is the kind of church we in Appalachia aspire to become.

A GROWING CHORUS OF STORIES

People in Appalachia have not been afraid to “talk back” to the stories others tell about us, stories that place limits, that present caricatures, that dominate our existence, and that constrict our imaginations. When people at the grassroots let our voices be heard, we take our place in the wider story of our region, our nation, our church and our world, challenging narratives that strangle, suffocate and suppress the Spirit and image of God among us.

And so before daring to offer any call to action, we have simply asked people in Appalachia, and in particular, those who are struggling,

a simple, but very profound question:
*What is it like to be you?*¹³
And further,
What is it like to be you in this place?

We know that there are voices
we have not heard closely enough in the past.
Some people within our communities
have stories that we are only now beginning to hear.
Others are victims of exclusion
that this global economy has created
in more recent years.

In this People's Pastoral,
we have expanded the scope of our listening
in various ways:

- listening sessions and conversations held by CCA members and related church and secular groups
- our own experiences as advocates, ministers, and activists among struggling communities
- conversations and questionnaires at Catholic parishes and other faith communities, and online
- and close attention to organizations, activists, and journalists in Appalachia who have documented people's stories in their communities.

We have heard stories from:

- residents of mountain communities
- working people
- homeless
- women
- youth
- people of color
- Native people
- Latinas and Latinos
- gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people
- sex workers
- women religious

- activists
- people from diverse religious traditions
- people who have left the Catholic church
- and people who have left the region.

Many stories from Appalachia
are before our eyes and at our fingertips
almost daily in the media.
They are not difficult to find,
and at times—
as in the case of mine disasters
and other tragedies—
they are almost impossible to avoid.

Like many Americans,
and people throughout the world,
people of faith in Appalachia
listened with deep concern
to the stories of those affected
by mine disasters at Sago in 2006
and Upper Big Branch in 2010,
and to the experiences of 300,000 residents
in the vicinity of Charleston, West Virginia
whose water was contaminated by
the Elk River chemical spill in 2014.
Those of us who take a deeper interest
in the experience of people in Appalachia,
and actively seek out their stories,
might encounter a story like that of
a three-year-old child from Inman, Virginia
who in 2004 was crushed in his bed by a boulder
that rolled from a mountaintop removal site
into the side of his house.¹⁴

Stories like these
have the power to shake many of us
out of our blindness.
They reveal reality to us in new ways,
prompt new questions,
and set us on a path toward
changing the social circumstances
that create such tragedies.

At the same time,
focusing only on these high profile stories
can hide the stories of daily life

THE VOICE OF THE LAND

in Appalachian communities.
It seems we become aware for a moment,
and then we go back to our regular lives
once the tragedy is “resolved,”
or at least once it disappears
from our televisions and social media.

When tragedies like these happen,
well-meaning people try to comprehend
but often think through stereotypes, asking
“When will these people in Appalachia learn?
When will they start to take pride
in themselves,
and in where they live?
And when will they change
and demand a better life for themselves
and for their children?”



Answering these questions is not easy
because the problems are complicated,
and political, economic, cultural, and environmental
patterns are so deeply rooted.
But these questions themselves are misguided,
because they are shaped by the stories
told by powerful interests
which do not allow the people
to have a voice of their own.

So in our movements for justice
we have learned the importance
of changing the story
by first changing the questions,
and we look to the voices
of ordinary people and of the land
as the only appropriate starting place.

The story of *the land itself* in Appalachia,
and its destruction at the hands of industry,
is a good starting point
because the poverty which the land suffers
is central to the story of our region.
Although some of the most severe
of the land’s wounds are hidden from sight
away from our cities
and the traffic of our interstates,
once we see the truth of these wounds,
it is difficult to forget Earth’s anguish.
And whether we are aware of it or not,
the poverty of the land
is something all of us,
no matter who we are,
share in one way or another.

In many ways,
people in Appalachia are just as alienated
from the rest of creation
as other people throughout the world.
But some Appalachians
retain a reverence for the land
that lies at the heart of the region’s culture.

Geologists tell us that this land is home
to some of the oldest mountains on Earth.
Biologists tell us that these mountains are home
to some of the most diverse soil, plant,
and animal life on the planet.
Countless songs have been written
by Appalachian singers
which breathe images of mountains,
trees, flowers, rivers, streams,
and animal life
into memorable melodies
that remind us of home.

Likewise, “At Home in the Web of Life”
poetically described the natural beauty
of God’s creation in Appalachia:

*To live in these mountains and forests,
and with their trees and plants and animals,
is truly to dwell in Earth's community of life,
as one of God's awesome cathedrals.*

In this magnificent work of God's creation,

- *misty mountain haze is holy incense,*
- *tall tree trunks are temple pillars,*
- *sun-splashed leaves are stained glass,*
- *and song-birds are angelic choirs.*¹⁵

Many Appalachians,
especially those who live close to desecrated places,
have come to believe that Jesus' commandment
to love and serve one's neighbor
includes a special love for our neighbor, Earth.
When we really befriend the land,
we become attuned to Earth's voice,
convinced that
"The land will talk to us.
It will tell us things."¹⁶



Though many of us have a deep sense
of the sacredness of the land,
logging and mining industries
entered these mountains after the Civil War,
and since then have threatened
Appalachian ecosystems,
including human communities,
as the region's economy became dependent
on taking resources from Earth
on increasingly massive scales.

Although coal is less important today
in terms of jobs and economic livelihood,
coal still touches everything in Appalachia,
even if only in our minds,
or as a source of a proud heritage.

In the last twenty years,
the practice of strip mining has become
increasingly mechanized and severe,
and its most violent form
has been dubbed "mountaintop removal."¹⁷
This form of mining utterly desecrates the land
and has become disturbingly widespread.
Mountaintop removal has become
well known to people
both inside and outside Appalachia.
As awareness grows,
increasing numbers of people have begun
to oppose it,
perhaps most especially
people outside of the region.

In many cases, the process begins
with clear-cutting and burning
Earth's forests and rich topsoil.
Massive amounts of explosives
blow apart the peaks of mountains
to expose the coal seams inside.
The rubble that is produced,
called "overburden" by the industry,
is pushed into nearby valleys,
covering the headwaters of streams
and disturbing or destroying
diverse communities of wildlife.

The coal extracted from Earth's body
is washed with toxic chemicals.
The waste from cleaning,
called slurry,
is stored in giant ponds,
often tucked out of sight,
but perilously close to human communities
who are at risk of inevitable leaks, spills, floods,
and other accidents.

Mountaintop removal is an act of radical violence that leaves monstrous scars across Earth's body resembling moonscapes, dead zones on our planet which cannot be restored to their prior life-giving condition in our lifetimes. Many people who see these wounds up close lament:
"This land is deadlier than dead can be," and "This is what the end of the world looks like to me."¹⁸

THE VOICES OF WOMEN

People frequently connect the assault they see inflicted upon nature with the abuse of women. When they lament the rape of Earth, this strong language is not merely a figure of speech, but points to the real and violent ways that the bodies of women are violated, abused, and exploited in acts of power and possession. Just as we humans have viewed ourselves as masters and owners of nature, history shows how women have been treated as objects without value or voice.

Women continue to face significant barriers in our region which make fullness of life difficult. Although sexism still permeates North American society in so many ways, it remains unusually tenacious in this region. Sexism is transmitted and upheld through church traditions which explicitly or implicitly misuse scripture and faith traditions to justify the exclusion, domination, and abuse of women. Women's roles continue to be limited not only in churches,

but also in the family, in the wider community, and in the region's male-centered economy.

We heard the story, for example, of a young single mother in Virginia who did not finish high school but decided to pursue a GED and a college education to become an accountant. She lived at home, and her parents, especially her father, resented her participation in college courses. Since she had children, they thought she should be home with them, "teaching them the Bible." When it came time for finals, her parents forbade her to take them because she had work to do at home. She did as she was told, and one day when her father was clearing land and burning brush in a fire, she made her father proud by burning her school books and papers. After destroying her dreams on that pyre, she went back to the house and cried. Eventually, she left her parents' house, and their control, and went back to school to become a nurse.¹⁹



Although stories like these are still common, the experiences of women, like the stories of others considered inferior,

can become a source of a desire for change. Thus women are often the ones leading the way to justice in our mountain communities.²⁰

THE VOICES OF COALFIELD RESIDENTS

Over the last twenty years, we have heard stories from communities who live in close proximity to extreme forms of mining like mountaintop removal. Not all coalfield residents experience the same threats, and many feel the benefits of the coal industry outweigh the costs associated with mining. Still, we listen most closely to the stories of those who continue to cry out for life in the face of destruction.



The stories of the destruction of the ecosystem bleed into the stories of the people. The stories are one because, as people native to this land believed, and “At Home in the Web of Life” echoed, the web of life is one.

We have heard story after story of the poisoning of water—streams, rivers, lakes, wells, and entire community water supplies.

We have seen communities where creeks run orange with acid, where faucets spit grey or brown liquid, and where mothers bathe their children in arsenic-laced waters.

Where water is poisoned, life cannot thrive.

We have heard stories from communities whose streams are no longer alive with fish and other life, whose once fertile fruit trees are lifeless, whose soil is contaminated and unable to produce gardens.

We have heard the experiences of those living life amid the suffocating threats of flyrock and coal dust.

Coalfield communities have long known the effects of poor air and water quality on their bodies, seeing rates of

- asthma
- cancers and tumors
- liver disease
- lung disease
- kidney stones
- rashes
- burning eyes
- birth defects
- and stillbirths

increase among the people, even among the young.²¹

An increasing number of scientific studies confirm what coalfield residents have known directly for many years.²²

Flooding has long been associated with coal mining activities.

Those of us in coalfield communities see very clearly the connection between mining, erosion, and flooding.

McRoberts, Kentucky, for example, endured five major floods within a span of eighteen months,

following an increase in mining activity, after not having any flooding in nearly 45 years.²³

These tragedies and others, deemed “acts of God” by industry, are fresh on our minds in Appalachia, such as the slurry spill in Martin County, Kentucky in October 2000.

Early in the morning, a two billion gallon slurry pond, owned by Massey Energy, broke, releasing 300 million gallons of black sludge into the Tug Fork, Big Sandy, and Ohio Rivers. As a result, the water supply of 27,000 people was contaminated. The spill was thirty times as large as the Exxon Valdez oil spill of 1989. Massive coal fly ash spills occurred in Roane County, Tennessee in 2008 and on the Dan River in North Carolina in 2014.

The stories coming from these communities contain strong elements of fear—

- fear of blasting
- fear of accidents
- fear of flooding
- fear of contaminated water
- fear of the loss of land
- fear of disease and poor health
- fear of the future
- fear of being ostracized in the community should they speak of their experiences
- and fear of being voiceless in their communities or in their options for life that are available to them.

Extreme mining activity destroys a person’s sense of place and of home along with the landscape. People living in mining areas in Appalachia and beyond often grieve the loss of home as they would the loss of a dear friend,

a condition some are calling *solastalgia*.²⁴ Studies have confirmed higher rates of depression in the coalfields, often related to this loss of place.²⁵ People of faith would be right to consider this grief a kind of spiritual death.

Time and time again, our people in the coalfields feel that they are “not treated like humans,” that they “do not count,” that even the dead are disrespected as family cemeteries are isolated from access or even destroyed at the hands of mining projects.²⁶

THE VOICES OF MINERS

The voices of our coal miners, and their families and friends, are often pitted against the voices of our environmentalists by politicians and mainstream media alike who tell a simplistic story of a “new Civil War” in Appalachia. For people of faith, this competitive view is untrue because the beauty of God’s creation demands the dignity of the whole: Earth, the human person, and all of God’s creatures. Therefore, the stories of Appalachians who have made their livelihood in the region’s mines must be honored and held sacred as well.

Many parts of Appalachia, but not all, have relied on coal mining as an occupation and way of life since the rise of industrialization in the late nineteenth century. The coal industry was responsible for the founding of entire towns in Appalachia.

Some parts of Appalachia even came to be called “coal country,” or “the coalfields,” as a coal-centered economy took over every aspect of life.

As the values of an increasingly industrialized American mainstream came into conflict with those of the earlier subsistence-based Appalachian society, that conflict also became a story of struggle between the companies and the workers. That long struggle, symbolized in events such as the Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia, resulted in greater unionization of the workplace, and with it, greater safety regulations, more adequate pay and benefits, and a greater measure of job retention.

Despite progress in the early twentieth century, the struggle for worker justice continues as global energy corporations still seek ways of increasing profit at any cost, including the health and well-being of the human persons who do the daily work. And as that struggle continues, the great stories of the worker justice in Appalachia are often forgotten, and even intentionally buried.

Miners still struggle regularly against attempts to roll back hard-won victories of better pay and benefits. People of faith, including laity, religious, and clergy, have stood with retired miners in public protests against the attempt by a handful of mining companies to eliminate health and retirement benefits by spinning off their union mines into new subsidiary companies and then filing for bankruptcy.²⁷

The disasters at Sago and Upper Big Branch touched many hearts.

Reports on those disasters revealed systemic problems in the mining industry and among their political allies, problems that miners and their families have known for decades.

Mining companies, especially those with non-union mines, have a dark “history of inadequate commitment to safety.”²⁸

Accidents are not as random as they appear, but are the result of a culture of disregard for worker safety.

Coal industry villains come and go, but the attitude which places profit above safety is deeply embedded in the coal economy.²⁹



Over lunch at a diner in Preston County, West Virginia, we heard stories from union and non-union miners alike who are concerned about continued unsafe conditions in Appalachia’s mines. Inadequate ventilation, buildup of flammable coal dust, and unsafe movement of equipment that is often outdated or defective are problems cited in union and non-union mines alike. We heard the story of a miner who worked as a contractor in the mine at Sago, West Virginia,

and moved to a new site just months before the January 2, 2006 explosion trapped 13 miners underground for two days, killing all but one.

He, and other miners as well, live and work in conditions where the potential for another accident like Sago or Upper Big Branch is possible at almost any moment.

In both union and non-union mines, it is more profitable for companies to pay the relatively small fines related to safety violations— or to avoid taking responsibility through lengthy litigation— than it is to follow regulations. In addition to the risks of accidents, the daily negligence surrounding the buildup of coal dust has contributed to the resurgence of black lung disease, despite the passing of the Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act of 1969.³⁰

While the differences between union and non-union mines are significant in terms of pay and benefits, we heard from miners, particularly younger miners, who continue to raise questions about the weakening of unions in the coal industry. The number of union mines continues to plummet, with mining companies doing anything they can to break the unions in their mines. Companies owning union mines use tactics designed to divide and conquer, such as turning a blind eye to younger miners who are often more reckless on the job, and the practice of hiring non-union contractors.

Although organizing continues to contribute to better work conditions, potential union activity

is met with the threat of layoffs and shutdowns. Unemployed miners stand ready to take the jobs of those who “cause trouble,” so many miners tend to stay quiet for fear of losing their jobs and speak out carefully only at strategic moments. And many good people at the managerial level struggle with the need to make a living while feeling complicit with workplace injustice. As one miner put it, “You’re not going to risk your job if you got nothing coming in.”

THE VOICES OF ECONOMICALLY VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Fear of losing or not finding work is worsening in many parts of Appalachia. It is not difficult, for example, to find the stories of the loss of coal mining jobs. A drive through the once bustling towns of “coal country” will tell those stories. Coal jobs have been on the decline for decades and continue to plummet.³¹

This loss of livelihood, without anything to replace it, is an old story in Appalachia which has only worsened with time. Even amid the boom and bust cycles the coal industry has experienced over time, other industries such as steel provided well-paying jobs well into the 1980s in some parts of the region. The U.S. free trade policies of the 1990s encouraged manufacturing jobs to move to the global South, leaving far less opportunity for people to make a living and provide for their families.³² Economic development has largely focused on attracting outside industries to save the region through job creation. Many of these industries, such as for-profit prisons and military technology often bring with them their own injustices.³³

The most widespread jobs in many areas of Appalachia are minimum wage service jobs which are inadequate for making ends meet. Job security is low, and companies continually weaken the ability of workers to organize and secure their rights. Unemployment and underemployment levels are still higher in the region than national averages.³⁴ Without work, some families are forced to rely on welfare payments and make the understandable choice to “live off the system” to feed their children, while many young Appalachians feel they must leave the region to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

In the poorest parts of rural Appalachia, the poverty rate can approach 25%. High poverty rates combined with population decline and the closing of businesses can result in the creation of “food deserts,” places where people live further than ten or twenty miles from the nearest grocery store. In a global food system which produces vast amounts of cheap but unhealthy food and isolates people from knowledge of food production, this is not simply inconvenient, but deadly. In such communities, where income is scarce, transportation options are few, and some families lack refrigeration and stoves, many people rely on low-nutrition, packaged foods from convenience stores, while rates of obesity, diabetes, and other health problems skyrocket. The widespread presence of food insecurity is an ironic reversal for a region that was once populated by subsistence farms and where family gardens were once popular.³⁵

Entire towns, even whole counties, appear vacated, like ghost towns, throughout Appalachia.³⁶ Some communities, such as Lindytown, West Virginia, have even been bought out by coal companies who raze what is left to the ground, erasing them entirely.³⁷ A Jesuit priest in McDowell County, West Virginia gestured toward a street of abandoned buildings as well as a coal processing plant towering over the town, comparing the trauma experienced there to “being at a wake for a loved one.”

We know communities in the region where a lack of jobs and opportunity makes people feel like “nobodies,” and where people lose faith in the possibility of change for the better. And when despair dominates families and communities, they can come under the influence of alcohol and drug addiction. Indeed, addiction to painkillers such as OxyContin, nicknamed “hillbilly heroin,” have become widespread in areas where people suffer from chronic pain induced by work-related injuries. Heroin addiction is also on the rise. We have heard stories of elderly persons supplementing their income by selling their prescriptions, of elementary school children who already have experience taking pain killers, and even of a West Virginia mayor who was murdered by a relative in order to obtain money for drugs.

Although some people are accustomed to look upon drug addicts in Appalachia with disdain, we should not reduce addiction to a personal or cultural vice. Addiction is often closely related to poverty

and includes the spiritual dimension of despair. Drug rehabilitation programs are relatively scarce in Appalachia, and the programs that are in place find themselves overburdened with the number of addicts who need treatment. Drug companies and unscrupulous persons in the medical field are also part of this story, as they stand to benefit financially when they push particular pain medications in vulnerable communities.³⁸

THE VOICES OF THE HOMELESS AND IMPRISONED

Unemployment, combined with substance abuse and despair, can be a recipe for homelessness or imprisonment.³⁹

We have listened to the experiences of persons who are homeless or imprisoned in our region.

Many women who are homeless have experienced domestic violence, and many homeless men are veterans. In many communities, resources are few, and society's view of the homeless continues to become more and more hostile.

Some have experienced a process of "transinstitutionalization," that is, of being transferred through a cycle from hospitals to prisons or other facilities. Prisons in Appalachia, many of them private, for-profit institutions, have become "internment camps for addicts," housing people involved in non-violent, drug-related crimes.

Prisons can be overcrowded with inmates, and some have been reported for human rights violations.

Women in prison for drug-related crimes are at risk of losing their children permanently, which results in further feelings of guilt and despair.

We heard from a woman who carried a child in prison without adequate care such as check-ups and vitamins, and so she lived with the daily terror of losing her baby.



Prisoners often have difficulty making contact with people who could help them, such as lawyers or clergy.

Without community support, there is a likelihood that they will lack options once they serve their terms and attempt to reorder their lives. Many will not be able to find work due to their criminal record, and their cycle of unemployment, despair, and addiction will continue.

THE VOICES OF COMMUNITIES IMPACTED BY THE OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY

New industries periodically sweep into Appalachia claiming the power to bring people out of the cycles of unemployment and poverty. Politicians and industry leaders are now promoting oil and gas to

- help wean the United States off of foreign oil
- provide a cleaner and safer source of energy, perhaps as a “transition fuel” as renewable energy technology develops
- and create jobs in regions suffering from unemployment.

Proponents claim the Marcellus shale deposit in western New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Virginia, and West Virginia could supply energy to the nation by itself for 45 years.⁴⁰

While deposits such as these were once too expensive to extract, we have poured billions of dollars of public funds into subsidies and tax breaks for oil and gas research and exploration.⁴¹

A new extraction technique, called hydraulic fracturing (or “fracking”), has been developed, prompting large scale drilling activity.⁴²

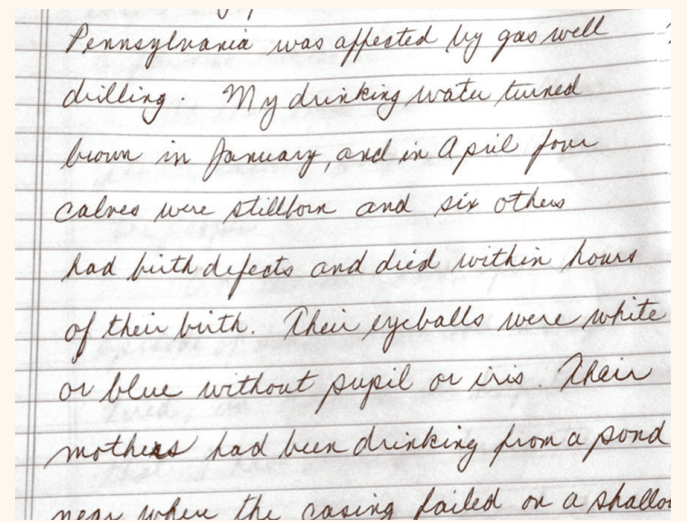
Whatever the perceived benefits, the human and ecological costs are severe.

Construction of well pads, pipelines, compressor stations, and more, disturb the natural world and disrupt the lives of families and whole communities all over the country, many of them here in Appalachia. Some of the drilling activity has been welcomed by landowners because of short-term economic benefit. Other landowners struggle with invasive drilling tactics and conflicts over the legal meaning of land and resource rights, a story with which coalfield residents are familiar.⁴³

The social effects of the drilling boom throughout the country have been severe. Residents of gas field areas witness increased dangerous truck traffic and deteriorating road conditions, increased stress from noise pollution,

an increase in rent, and a decrease in property values. The influx of workers from outside the region results in an increase in population concentrated in hotels and in makeshift campsites nicknamed “man camps.”

These communities of workers are in many ways unaccountable to the community, and sometimes bring with them increased violence, drug and alcohol abuse, sexual assault, and prostitution.⁴⁴



Some of the most dangerous and lasting effects come from the fracking process itself.⁴⁵ When shale is fracked, large amounts of water, sand, and a mixture of chemicals are injected into the ground to produce cracks, releasing gas to the surface where it is collected. The drilling process requires up to 5 million gallons per well, which is taken from local rivers and streams. Some water is recycled, but contaminated water is not able to be recycled for human consumption or use, and some water is forever lost from the biosphere into the mile-deep shale. The contaminated water, called “flowback,” comes back to the surface where it is permanently stored

in large collection ponds onsite or transported elsewhere.⁴⁶

Residents near fracking sites in both rural and urban areas, as well as health officials, have begun to describe serious health concerns connected to this industry.⁴⁷

Experts estimate that close to 400 chemicals are used in the fracking process. Many of the chemicals are unknown as the industry labels them “proprietary information,” complicating the efforts of health professionals treating chronic disease in fracking areas.

Water and air can become contaminated at various stages of the process. The flowback stage of the process brings water to the surface containing radioactive and cancer-causing substances. Transportation and disposal of this water, which sometimes includes illegal dumping, present further opportunities for contamination.⁴⁸

Contaminated air and water can cause burning of the skin, eyes, and lungs, as well as nausea, headaches, and vomiting. In severe cases, damage to the respiratory, nervous, and endocrine systems can occur, as well as brain damage, various cancers, and birth defects.

The industry defends its practices by claiming that the use of these chemicals is harmless and that they operate within the limits of the law.⁴⁹ But most people are not aware that the oil and gas industry has been granted a number of exemptions to the very environmental laws the industry claims to abide by.⁵⁰

The EPA's study and oversight of the industry over the last decade

has been mixed at best, but its most recent study of impacted water supplies acknowledges that contamination has occurred.⁵¹ Community hearings and listening sessions provide testimony from people's experience with its own authority.⁵²

From his back porch in Washington County, Pennsylvania, a livestock farmer and environmental activist described his own story and those of his neighbors.⁵³ In his community, water has turned black and become flammable, testing for high levels of contaminants. Livestock have been born sick, blind, and deformed, or have been stillborn, and fish have disappeared or mutated. Truck drivers who transport waste material have experienced rashes, dizziness, migraines, and swelling of the face and limbs. Community members regularly report that their local environmental protection agencies side with the gas companies and do little to protect them.

Another livestock farmer in Washington County named Terry Greenwood reported livestock deaths and disfigurement following a frack water spill into his pond and a well blowout which left his drinking water looking like “iced tea.” When Terry notified environmental authorities, they told him “That's a farmer's luck.” Watching the destruction of his water, his land, his animals, his farm, and his business, Terry regularly said, “Now it's the cattle. Soon it will be the people.” In March 2014, an MRI revealed multiple tumors of a rare brain cancer in Terry's brain. Three months later, he passed away. Activists in shale gas communities remember

Terry's words as they struggle in defense of their communities' land and health: "Water is more important than gas."

These stories represent the tip of the iceberg, as they merely reflect the immediate effects of the natural gas industry on the land and on communities.

The sheer number of *unknowns* makes it very difficult to predict the impact these industries will have on the environment and on human health.⁵⁴

Many people impacted by fracking cannot help but think that this is but a new chapter in the same old story of resource extraction in Appalachia, where industry, assisted by politicians, exerts control over resources, land, even whole communities. Their stories indicate that people have little say over the impact these industries will have over their everyday lives.

THE VOICES OF PEOPLE OF COLOR

Many new voices have emerged in our region since our last pastoral letter in 1995. Some of these voices have always been present here, but were not heard in our movements. Other voices are truly new to the region, reflecting more recent realities that have risen up to take their place in the story.

Many people in our church communities, for example, must admit that we have not heard or taken seriously the experiences of people of color in Appalachia. Appalachia is perceived, both from the outside and on the inside, as a region of "whiteness," Like many perceptions, the "whiteness" of Appalachia involves both fact and fiction,

as large parts of this region are less diverse than other parts of the country.

At the same time, the stories many of us tell about this place, which take the "whiteness" of the region for granted, often obscure the diversity that is actually present and silence the stories of different peoples who have dwelled in this land for ages, or who came to this region at various points in time.



It will not do, however, simply to insist that this region is just as diverse as other places, or that racism in Appalachia is no different than in other places. There are experiences of diversity and of racism specific to this place and we are still in the process of learning from one another the experiences of particular peoples over time.

Racism in our nation stretches back to the first encounters between colonizers and Native peoples but past and present experiences of Native peoples are still so often ignored. In part, this is because Native people are talked about as if they existed only in the past. Although acts of genocide against Native people are historical facts, Native communities are alive and present here today,

including Cherokee, Shawnee, Blackfoot, and Monacan peoples.

The relationship of Appalachia and Native cultures is complex. Many Appalachian people have admired Native people over the years for a variety of reasons, whether because of a historical interest in “frontier life” and accounts of “Indian Wars,” or by celebrating shared values between Native and Appalachian cultures, including closeness to the land, which shape particular ways of living in communion with creation.

Though this admiration is genuine, Native people and their traditions are often romanticized, and their traditions mined by white Appalachians for elements to enrich their sense of personal spirituality. The tendency to romanticize can distort the diverse and living nature of Native traditions and can leave non-Native people unaware of or insensitive to the issues Native communities face today.

Members of the Cherokee community in North Carolina, people of varying ages and backgrounds, spoke of the transmission of generational grief and trauma that comes from colonization and the continued devaluing of indigenous cultures, identities, and traditions by the dominant culture. Poor education, lack of work, and limited life options feel like a kind of economic slavery. A Native prison counselor and activist from Ohio reported that he has been the victim of harassment, detainment, and searches by law enforcement officials while travelling and attending events in Native attire. The exclusion from society these communities experience

can lead to an extreme loss of hope and a turn toward drugs and suicide.⁵⁵

Many of these issues parallel the experience of communities in the coalfields, though the historical circumstances are distinct. Despite the struggle for greater self-determination, Native communities and traditions continue to give witness to other ways of living in harmony with the land and with one another.

Whites in the Appalachian states tend to distance themselves from the history of slavery and anti-Black racism of the South, which prevents Black voices from being heard. Appalachian history and culture contain elements that nurture both a spirit of inclusivity, kinship, and belonging and one of fear, exclusion, and violence.⁵⁶ An African-American woman who grew up in Summers County, West Virginia recalled that she never felt a difference between Blacks and whites until she visited the county seat of Hinton or the larger city of Washington, DC.⁵⁷ But downplaying the history of racism within the Appalachian region is not an honest telling of the story.

Over the last several years, our nation has seen increasing visible expression of racism in speech, action, and political policies, as well as counter-racist responses. The violent attacks of September, 11, 2001, are certainly one part of this story, as those actions caused largely suppressed fear of the “other” to surface among many white Americans across class divides. These fears have made it more acceptable in some circles, particularly here in Appalachia, for white Americans to strongly assert the superiority of their dominant culture over perceived “outsider” cultures

that are considered threatening, namely Arabs, Latinas and Latinos, Blacks, and others.

The campaign and election of the first Black president of the United States is in many ways linked to newer waves of overt racist attitudes and white supremacist activity in our communities.

Deep listening to the experiences of Black Americans, and a broader view of American history enables us to see that what we are witnessing today is not the creation of new racial tension but a new visibility of the daily racist oppression faced by people of color. In our rural areas, small towns, and larger cities, we have heard stories of Black Appalachians that include

- patterns of disparity in poverty and wealth
- exclusion from housing opportunities
- higher rates of arrest, harassment, and violence at the hands of law enforcement
- and marginalization from cultural and political life.

In a region where ordinary people's worth tends to be devalued, the unique experiences of Black Appalachians cry out for recognition and affirmation that their lives matter.⁵⁸

Latina and Latino immigrants in Appalachia also face disadvantages and racism.⁵⁹ Like earlier waves of immigrants in the early twentieth century, Latinas and Latinos often struggle with the barrier of language and the reality of living between two cultures. Many experience a daily struggle for survival for themselves and their children due to lack of work. Access to work, of course, can be a challenge with or without proper documents.

Lack of documentation affects a significant number from this community and contributes to daily fear of law enforcement and of discrimination.

As jobs decline in the region, Latinas and Latinos are often victims of scapegoating by dominant whites and accused of "stealing jobs." Latina and Latino members of our churches tell us that they even experience inequality and rejection among fellow believers, especially in the lack of support for immigration reform. We heard stories of business owners who, in the absence of immigration justice, attempt to help those without documents find and retain meaningful work and live with greater peace of mind.

But these stories are the exception to the rule, as many employers take advantage of their workers' legal status.

THE VOICES OF GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDERED PEOPLE

Sexual minorities, too, have not been adequately heard in our movements and churches. Over the last several years, U.S. society has been alive with debates about the moral and social implications of the experience of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people as they assert more strongly their dignity and rights.

Some Appalachians believe that same-sex relationships threaten the natural state of things, including the institutions of marriage and family. But many Appalachian people identify as gay or lesbian, and have done so throughout history.

Gay experience in Appalachia is complex and contradictory.⁶⁰ On the one hand, rural Appalachia has been a place in which gay and lesbian people can feel safe. Appalachian culture can nurture a “live and let live” attitude where gay and lesbian people can live happy lives privately, without judgment, with deep integration in the community.⁶¹ Yet mere tolerance can mask the presence of a “quiet, but steady” rural homophobia, that “slow assault on the spirit” which comes from deeper and darker experiences of fear, shame, and closetedness.⁶²



Some of the fiercest hostility comes from people motivated by Christian teachings. In addition to focusing intently on Biblical passages that seem to condemn same-sex activity, the homophobia of many Christians is also linked to a Biblically-inspired belief in the superiority of men over women. Thus, males who are effeminate or attracted to men can become the target of religiously motivated ridicule and even violence.

Such extreme views are not limited to fundamentalist churches. Most Christian churches have been engaged

in heated debates about gay and lesbian experience. But beneath the sound bites, we must remember that people are at the center, not “issues.” And we must honestly acknowledge that even mainstream churches have served as havens of discrimination and hatred.

Churches that condemn same-sex relationships end up attacking the very personhood of gay and lesbian people, such that life can feel like a “constant assault.”⁶³ Many of us have had our hearts broken by the stories of gay family members and friends who have been on the receiving end of abuse from other people of faith. Gay and lesbian Catholics gathering for a retreat in Virginia shared experiences of being treated like lepers in society and in the church. Instead of a place of welcome and safety, the church is often “a hell of pain,” a place where they are “discussed and accused but rarely appreciated.”

But the church has not only been a source of pain. These retreatants also discussed how they continue to be nourished by the church’s spiritual life even though they cannot accept the church’s teaching about their sexuality. Traditional practices such as liturgy and adoration have been a source of comfort and hope. They have been comforted by friendships with gay priests and other individuals who affirm them as they are.

While gay and lesbian people often feel a kinship with the lepers of the gospels, what they need to be healed from is not a “disorder”

but alienation from the community
and the experience of being treated
as less than human.
Yet they often find God
precisely in their stories of struggle,
and healing can come from unexpected places,
even from churches that so often reject them.

VOICES IN CONTEXT: COAL, CAPITALISM, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

No single explanation or narrative can contain
all of the experiences and stories
in Appalachia today,
let alone all of the stories
of economic and ecological distress
that we have faced over the past 100 years.
Many explanations have been attempted
at different points in time,
such as blaming the region's conditions
on a generational culture of poverty
or on the exploitative tendencies
of a single industry, such as coal.

The increasing unemployment and hopelessness
experienced throughout Appalachia today
is often explained by the media and by politicians
as the inevitable result of a "War on Coal"
initiated by environmentalists
and progressive politicians.
But the creation of a political scapegoat
denies the reality
that mechanization,
natural gas,
and the dynamics of global capitalism
are the true reasons for the loss
of coal jobs in the region,
as coal executives quietly cash out their stocks
while the public is largely misdirected.⁶⁴

In such a situation
people feel they should be grateful
to have any job at all
no matter how dangerous
or how crushing to body and soul it may be.
And excuses are made

that such industries are "all we have"
and that the presence of resources
obligates the people here to lead lives of sacrifice
for the needs of "the common good"
or "national energy security."

The story of Appalachia
is the story of what many call a "sacrifice zone,"
one of the many places of suffering in our world
that are exploited for the sake
of a global capitalist economy
that seeks the "maximization of profit" at any cost⁶⁵
and funnels wealth to those at the top.
As the late Appalachian activist Larry Gibson
once put it,

*We're a little worn, we're a little bent,
we're a little broken, but we're real.
And we're here.
And we're tired of being collateral damage
or a sacrifice zone
for rich people and other people
to be comfortable in their life.*⁶⁶

Appalachia is not the only sacrifice zone
in our country or in our world,
nor is it the most severe.⁶⁷
In our nation alone,
the sacrifice zones of the global economy
are seen in the experience of Native communities,
in the poverty and violence of the inner city,
in the slavery-like conditions
of the fields of big agriculture
or low-wage, degrading workplaces.
The exploitation of labor in the global South,
the victimization of war-torn regions
by U.S.-led coalitions,
and the ravaged land and communities
of indigenous peoples
also follow the pattern of the sacrifice zone.

Although the suffering and struggles here
are specific to this region in some ways,
Appalachia also serves as a window⁶⁸
to so many other suffering places in our world
created by an economy that,

by design, kills.⁶⁹

As one Appalachian author and minister once put it, “Capitalism needs its Appalachias. Capitalism needs poor and oppressed people because it is in its very nature to create them.”⁷⁰

Many of us in Appalachia have learned to expand our view beyond a concern for this region alone, or on an aesthetic preference for preserved mountains or a protectionist view of mining jobs. With the whole world in view, we know that the extractive mentality that has dominated our region—an attitude that sees no limit to what we can take from Earth and refuses to face consequences—is at the heart of the destructive worldview that is killing our planet.⁷¹

We know that the way of life enjoyed by a small percentage of the human family, and the distribution of wealth enjoyed by an even smaller percentage, are profoundly unjust and unsustainable and climate change is rapidly bringing us to the brink of disaster.⁷²



“At Home in the Web of Life” described the issue of sustainability as a choice between the God of life and a culture of death.⁷³ But in today’s globalized context,

that urgency is felt even more strongly. At stake is not only the health of the region, but of the entire human species.

Whether we choose to act or not, everything is going to change because the systems which dominate our world are unsustainable and Earth itself will eliminate the human source of these systems that threaten creation’s balance. Today there is a growing sense of *apocalypse*, the gradual revelation that the old order of things is coming to an end. Signs of these endings include the death of coalfield communities and of entire industries which our culture’s storytellers assumed would be permanent features of the region.

But beyond apocalypse, beyond these endings, a new world is being revealed, and this should give us hope.

Many of us in Appalachia have been aware that things need to change radically, on both local and global scales, but many factors make it difficult for us to embrace bold visions of the change which needs to occur. Our nation’s addiction to fossil fuels is at the heart of the issues we face, but the power of these industries creates an economic stranglehold on our region and suffocates the political will of the people such that it is difficult to imagine alternatives let alone put them into practice.

It is not unreasonable to call this a kind of colonization. But these industries, driven by the mentality of extractive capitalism, have gone beyond the physical colonizing of our mountains and communities. Our understanding of our history,

our capacity to imagine,
and our visions of future possibility
have been colonized as well.

In order to change the course we are on,
we need to change the stories we tell
about ourselves,
our region,
and our place in the whole of creation.
Only then can we construct, from below,
the new economies
and “a new way of sharing this planet”⁷⁴
that we need in order *to do life differently*.
More than ever, we need new stories
about creation and the purpose of human life,
drawn from the best of our wisdom traditions.⁷⁵
And we in Appalachia,
in all of our diversity,
must take our place in the story in new ways
that help us find liberation
from the stories that have thus far
often led to death and destruction.

In part three of this pastoral letter,
we will hear some of the ways that
we in Appalachia
are taking our place in the story in new ways
and discovering ways of doing life differently.
But first, we turn to our diverse spiritual traditions
to rediscover rich soil that can ground our vision
and rekindle our capacity to imagine alternatives
so that we can change a story
of domination and destruction
into a story of resurrection and hope.

PART TWO

OUR TRADITIONS: THE GROUND OF OUR VISION

The great, gashed, half-naked mountain
is another of God's saints.
There is no other like him.
He is alone in his own character;
nothing else in the world ever did
or ever will imitate God in quite the same way.
That is his sanctity.
—*Thomas Merton*⁷⁶



The stories we have heard,
both large and small,
beg for concrete and lasting solutions
which dismantle oppression
and restore the web of life.
But before rushing into solutions or proposals,
we pause to reflect on the stories we have heard,
considering what our spiritual traditions have to say,
while looking at them with fresh eyes for new times.

SHAPED BY NEW STORIES

The stories we tell and hold sacred,
including the diverse creation stories
from our religious and cultural traditions,
have a capacity to distort reality
when we raise any one story
above all others
and make it unquestionable.
But our stories also have a capacity
to liberate Earth and ourselves
for new life
to the extent that they are open
to receive the gifts
that other stories have to offer.

“This Land is Home to Me”
helped us to see
that social and ecological injustice
in this region
stems from *idolatry*—
that false, unquestioned narrative
which shapes us to worship
the false gods of consumption and profit.
This false story
which places “profit over people,”
as the pastoral said,
is “hostile to the dignity of the earth
and of its people.”

“This Land is Home to Me” also reminded us,
well before the processes of globalization
spread devotion to this idol worldwide,
that worship of profit is “everybody’s problem,”

not only an issue in places like Appalachia.
It was precisely this idol worship
that Jesus condemned when he said,
“You cannot give yourselves
to God and Money.” (Matthew 6:24)

Growing numbers of believers
agree with this condemnation of idolatry
in principle.

It is increasingly easy to see
that love of money and profit
is distorting human relationships
with one another and with creation.
And so we nod our heads
when church leaders
and Sunday homilists say
from time to time
that people are more important than money.



Yet that same pastoral reminded us
that the idolatry of money
“overwhelms the good intentions of noble people.”
While most of us in this region,
and in this nation,
would not openly embrace the idol
as the ultimate concern in our lives,
the idol remains hidden,
present in places we least expect,
and we end up embracing it
without even knowing it.

The idol is present,
lurking in a number of popular
—and largely unquestioned—
economic, political, and cultural ideas.
These ideas work together like a constellation
to create a worldview that gives the idol life,
such that the image of God in the human person,
and in the natural world,
becomes obscured, disgraced,
or even destroyed.

These ideas, too, are idolatries
which serve and bolster the dominant idolatry
of money and of profit at any cost.
They include:

- the original sin of using difference
as a reason for domination:
not only male over female,
and white over black,
but also humanity over the rest of creation
- the arrogant, false mantras
of Manifest Destiny and cultural conquest⁷⁷
- the blind confidence in the market
and in false promises of happiness
if only we consume what the market provides
- the view of private property as an absolute right
and the buying and selling of creation
which is our common home
- the unquestioning, violent patriotism
that works like a powerful religion
to sanction and bless
an economy of endless war
- the illusion that competition
rather than cooperation
is the law of life
- and the belief that the way things are
is the way things have always been
and so must always be.

Even our churches fall for these idolatries
again and again,
such that they seem to be accepted
as religious truths from which we cannot dissent.
We allow our faith visions to be hollowed out
even by political talking heads
who convince us to deny,
like Peter the disciple,
the best of our traditions at their very heart.
When this occurs,
religion cooperates with injustice
and loses its prophetic impulse.

In order to turn our communities
and our world
away from the idolatry of money and profit,
it is necessary to name these idolatries
for what they are
and radically change the worldview
that is destroying persons as well as the planet.

But denouncing these old stories is not enough.
People of faith in Appalachia and beyond
have begun to rethink our traditions,
and to create relationships across traditions,
in order to topple the “old gods”⁷⁸
of our narrowmindedness
and take our place in a new global Earth story
that continues to evolve.

This new creation story must be:

- a story which listens deeply
to the world’s religious and cultural traditions,
honoring indigenous wisdom
and the deep awareness of the mystics⁷⁹
- a story which includes women as leaders
who are equal with men in dignity
- a story to help us view creation
not as dead matter for humans to dominate
but as a living unity of being
within which we human beings
must learn to take our place humbly





INTERLUDE: A CERULEAN WARBLER SPEAKS

Pope Francis has insisted that each creature “is good and admirable in itself” and that the members of the non-human world have “an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness” (Laudato Si’, no. 140). Although we are not able to hear their “voices” in the same way that we hear the voices of human stories, it is still essential for us to imagine ways to hear the “voices” of the non-human world. The following interlude is one example of the creative listening that is possible when we take seriously the intrinsic dignity of the smallest voices of creation.

I am grateful for this place to rest my weary wings in the sheltering branches of this towering tree. I shiver as I wait for the dawn chorus and for the sun to rise across the mountains, warming my sky-blue feathers. The darkness surrounds me, but my avian instincts sense my breeding grounds nearby, a mountaintop resplendent with diverse trees and vegetation. For years, this is where I gleaned nesting materials—bark, spider silk, bits of hair and fur for a lining. High in the treetop, nesting deeply within the dense forest canopy, I have protected my young from predation. Below, I found plentiful, life-giving water and an abundance of caterpillars and other insects to sustain my brood, my mate and me.

Dozing just now, I’m jarred by a thunderous booming followed by incessant beeping and many more unnatural grating sounds. My tiny lungs strain through the acrid smoke, noxious fumes and dust-filled air. I’m thoroughly confused. Danger in this darkness lurks. Instantly, I’m in flight mode. Lifting off the branch, what I see belies my years of returning here. What is happening to these lush forests, my summer home in the mountains of Central Appalachia? Below, instead of the welcome greening mountains of an Appalachian Spring, the landscape is barren, flattened, brown, desolate, and devoid of life. The ebullient streams have disappeared beneath thick piles of rock, rubble and debris—the remains of former mountains. A few humans are busily dumping mounds of a black rock into mammoth trucks. I overhear one refer to it as coal. For this coal, they destroy entire ancient mountains?

My 3,000 mile journey from the Andes to these Sister Mountains leaves me despairing for my future and future generations of my kind. While flying across the perilous expanse of the Gulf of Mexico, little did I imagine my summer home could ever disappear, though I’ve heard similar whispered chirpings from my elders. I’m told that like this tortured mountainscape, our kind, too, has declined dramatically in the last several human decades—70 out of every 100 Cerulean Warblers gone, gone, gone, though at one time in human history, we were abundant.

I can’t help but wonder as I witness the death of this mountain and its abundant life, if somewhere my Creator weeps and the human spirit is also diminished. Thankfully, I have faith in steadfast allies who care deeply and who are aware of my plight and the potential fate of these mountains. They are issuing this call to action which speaks for the marginalized and voiceless ones like me. For now, I cherish and hold dear this hope that the hearts and minds of those who despoil this land will soften. May this message open their eyes to the wonder and the unique beauty of nature in Appalachia while there is still time.

Janet Keating, Executive Director
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition
Huntington, West Virginia





- a story that is open and evolutionary, in harmony with the expanding insights of the sciences⁸⁰
- a story in which no one tradition dominates in an imperialistic way or silences the voices of marginalized communities
- and a story that welcomes and includes all, and that is always open to change and new understandings through authentic human encounter.

INTEGRAL ECOLOGY AND THE CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

For many years, vulnerable communities around the world have reflected on the effects the idolatry of money has had on the places they inhabit within the Earth community.⁸¹ They have begun to hear echoes of their stories in the story of others, listening to one another, not only across great geographical divides, but also ecumenically and across interreligious divides, as our sisters and brothers from the many Christian churches and from the world's religious traditions have awakened to these concerns as well.⁸² Reflecting from within our own traditions and in our own unique ways, we dialogue in order to identify more clearly the problems we face and the solutions we need to pursue.

These reflections are not new in the Roman Catholic tradition. Recent popes, for example, have heard the cry of the poor and the cry of Earth, and have lifted up these cries in their teaching.

From the beginning of his ministry, John Paul II insisted with urgency that "The ecological crisis is a moral crisis!"⁸³ He described creation, and God's plan for it, as a harmonious, integrated whole against which humans have rebelled.

*When [we turn our] back on the Creator's plan, [we] provoke[] a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order.*⁸⁴

Benedict XVI, whom many call "the Green Pope," echoed the worldview of indigenous peoples when he called for "intergenerational solidarity" that honors the responsibility we have to future generations.⁸⁵ He also clearly saw how ecological destruction is a root cause for conflict in the world, teaching, "If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation."⁸⁶

Benedict's successor, a Jesuit from Argentina, chose the name Francis after St. Francis of Assisi, indicating the focus of his ministry as Bishop of Rome. Pope Francis affirmed that focus before reporters soon after his election, saying, "Oh, how I wish for a church that is poor and for the poor!"⁸⁷ Through his gestures, lifestyle choices, and decisions in church governance, Francis has reminded both the church and the world of the essence of the Gospel, which is a discipleship focused on the poor and on creation.⁸⁸

This Pope looks, not inward toward the church, but outward, toward a world

“where the powerful feed upon the powerless,”⁸⁹
 and where the majority of peoples
 are excluded and alienated
 from the goodness and divine gift
 that is “our common home.”
 He provides a diagnosis
 that resonates with our experience
 here in Appalachia:
 a global culture and economy have developed
 which not only oppress, but exclude,
 leaving entire peoples across the globe
 “without work, without possibilities,
 without any means of escape.”⁹⁰



Echoing the diagnosis of
 our own Appalachian pastorals,
 Francis insists:
*We have created new idols.
 The worship of the ancient golden calf...
 has returned in a new and ruthless guise
 in the idolatry of money
 and the dictatorship of an impersonal economy
 lacking a truly human purpose.*⁹¹

Francis could not be more clear:
 “Such an economy kills.”⁹²
 Like the gods of old,
 this idolatrous economy demands sacrifice.
 It “tends to devour everything
 which stands in the way of increased profits.”⁹³
 And although people are among the victims,
 creation itself is victimized too.
[W]hatever is fragile,

*like the environment,
 is defenseless before the interests
 of a deified market.*⁹⁴

Solutions which pit people
 and the environment against one another
 will not do, says Francis.
 Rather, “everything is connected,”⁹⁵
 and he promotes a vision of “integral ecology”
 in which human beings
 take their proper place in the web of life.
 Because “every creature,
 particularly a living creature,
 has an intrinsic value,”
 Francis says that we need to recognize
 that *creation itself has rights.*⁹⁶

When we forget
 that everything is connected,
 and that Earth has intrinsic value
 apart from its usefulness to human beings,
 we provoke a crisis.
 Francis says,
*Once the human being declares
 independence from reality
 and behaves with absolute dominion,
 the very foundations of our life
 begin to crumble.*⁹⁷

So the crisis of a deadly economy
 over time becomes ever more complicated:
*We are faced not with two separate crises,
 one environmental and the other social,
 but rather with one complex crisis
 which is both social and environmental.*⁹⁸

Whether in a homily, speech, or encyclical,
 there is an urgency to Francis’ words
 that we cannot leave solutions
 to the next generations
 but must act immediately.
 But we cannot simply repeat ideas
 from Catholic social teaching or elsewhere.
 For Francis, the “People’s Pope,”
 people are central,
 especially the poor,

and the way forward together
is by nurturing what he regularly calls
a “culture of encounter”:

*We need to build up this culture of encounter.
We do not love concepts or ideas;
no one loves a concept or an idea.
We love people...⁹⁹*

Francis urges us to find one another again,
placing the poor and excluded at the center,
and to enter deeply into the unfolding history
of the struggle for a better world
informed by the Gospel.¹⁰⁰

The culture of encounter
of which Francis speaks
calls the whole Church—
the People of God
which includes the Roman Catholic Church,
but stretches well beyond it—
to deep conversion and renewal.
Francis envisions a radically inclusive Church
driven by mercy and the option for the poor
and oriented to outward-looking mission.¹⁰¹

But while Francis points to a global crisis,
like Pope Paul VI before him,
he says that one Pope,
and one church,
with a view from above,
cannot possibly have all the answers.¹⁰²

The transformation that Francis envisions
happens locally in places
and in our relationships with one another
as we are knit together as the Body of Christ.
This knitting together of peoples,
comes from below,
happening primarily among movements
and communities of struggle,
not as a result of the ideas of great leaders
imposed from above:

*From those seeds of hope
patiently sown in the forgotten fringes of our planet,*

*from those seedlings of a tenderness
which struggles to grow
amid the shadows of exclusion,
great trees will spring up,
great groves of hope to give oxygen to our world.¹⁰³*

Caring for our world,
our common home,
must necessarily include
caring for the specific places and people
in which we find ourselves,
led always by those
who have been excluded from consideration.
Committed to that culture of encounter,
we, the People of God in Appalachia,
find affirmation of our re-membered history,
and we are urged to continue
reading the signs of the times,
turning to the Word of God
and to the insights of marginalized women and men,
in Appalachian and beyond,
to nourish our efforts.

THE PLACE OF GOD’S PEOPLE: ISRAEL AND EMPIRE

Pope Francis reminds us
that God’s Word is alive,
ever new with a freshness for new times
and new places.¹⁰⁴
From the perspective of broken places,
particularly those places treated
like throwaway regions or sacrifice zones,
insights from scripture appear in a new light.

Many of us are starting to see
that the Bible presents a story
of the wisdom of the whole of God’s *creation*,
of humanity’s connection with all other life,
and of our need to live humbly,
rooted in distinct places
and within certain biological limitations.
But scripture also reveals *sin* to us,
our tendency to stray from that story
as time and time again
we humans choose to live beyond our limits

and dominate creation and one another.
And finally,
scripture points to the possibility
of *re-creation*, of *re-mem-bering*, of *redemption*.
It calls human persons and communities
to take our proper place in the story,
knitting back together the one Body of creation
and living humbly within the web of life.¹⁰⁵

Writing in the midst of their exile
in the Babylonian empire,
Israel re-told its own creation story,
a story at odds
with the violent creation story of the empire.
In the new story,
creation occurs not through an act of violence,
but through the fruitful,
loving speech of God.¹⁰⁶

The divine is not found
in human-made imperial cities.
In this new story,
God's presence is found in all of creation:
*God looked at all of this creation,
and proclaimed that this was good
—very good.* (Gen. 1:31)
"Dominion" over Earth
is not the possession of kings
or of other human master-builders.
In the new story,
all of humanity shares equally
in that responsibility of care and love:¹⁰⁷
*Let us make humankind in our image,
to be like us.
Let them be stewards of the fish in the sea,
the birds of the air,
the cattle,
the wild animals,
and everything that crawls on the ground.* (Gen. 1:26)

And instead of an imperial economy
that imagines itself as the source
of everything good, including food,
the new story describes Earth's fruitfulness
as the more-than-sufficient
gift of the Divine:

*The earth brought forth
every kind of plant that bears seed,
and every kind of fruit tree
that bears fruit with its seed in it.
And God saw that this was good.* (Gen. 1:12)

In short,
the new story of God's people
describes very clearly
that creation is God's garden,
and that human communities
exist within God's garden as caretakers,
receiving with gratitude all of God's good gifts
and using them only in ways
that nurture and sustain life to the full.

But the story contains
not only the ideal of Eden,
but also the story of struggle
against destructive forces
who seek to force the ways of empire
on a people trying to remain faithful
to God's plan for creation.
And it is also a story of the temptation
faced by God's people
to follow in the ways of empire themselves.

After the Great Flood,
the descendants of Noah spread throughout Earth.
Fearing that they might become "scattered"
and lose control of life,
the human family sets out
to "make a name for themselves,"
building a city with an imperial tower.
God dismantles this act of human arrogance,
putting human beings "back in their place"
within the web of life.¹⁰⁸

We then see an unfolding story
of God continually calling humanity
out from lives of arrogance,
of empire,
of exploitative economic relations, and
of unbalanced relationship with,
and destruction of,
Earth.

We are familiar with
the story of God's liberation
of the Hebrew people from slavery
under the Egyptian empire
in the book of Exodus.
God hears the cry of the oppressed
and lets the imprisoned go free
to pursue self-determination
as God's faithful people.

But liberation from slavery is not the end,
and the Israelites still needed to learn
how to properly take their place in God's story.
While wandering hungry in the desert,
the Israelites longed return to slavery
where at least they had their fill of food.
Yet in their wandering
God teaches them to trust
the daily gifts of breath and bread
without hoarding or greed.¹⁰⁹

God's people
were set apart by a rule of life
reflected in the book of Leviticus.
These laws are a product of their time,
and some may seem obscure, irrelevant,
or even dangerous to modern ears.
But even in their ambiguity,
they teach us that the call to holiness
must embrace all of life.
The lives of human beings,
animals, vegetation, and the land
are so intertwined,
that each one is to participate
in the cycles of rest and jubilee

- where the land is allowed
to rest and rejuvenate
- where property is periodically redistributed
to its original owner
- where laborers are released
from their bondage
- and where food and the essentials of life
are not sold for profit.

When God's people
take their proper place within nature,
creation will be in balance,
and life, as a whole, will thrive.¹¹⁰
But when human beings become arrogant
and misuse the gifts of God's garden,
then creation itself will rebel
against its human abusers and will
make up for the Sabbath years
human beings did not give to it.
*For all the years it lies desolate,
the land will have its rest,
the rest it did not get when you worked it.*
(Leviticus 26: 34-35)



In the course of the story,
God's people give into the temptation
to have a king
and to live like other nations and empires.¹¹¹
Prophets like Amos and Jeremiah arose
to condemn the exploitation of the poor,
the destruction of the land,
and the royal systems
that threaten God's created order.
These prophets preached horrifying visions
to beg their people to open their eyes
to the destruction that these systems
would cause.

*I looked at the earth—
it was chaos and emptiness.
I looked to the heavens—
Their light was gone.
I looked to the mountains—*

*They quaked,
and the hills swayed back and forth.
I looked—
I saw no one. Nothing!
All the birds had flown away.
I looked—
The fertile land was desert.
(Jeremiah 4:23-26)*

The destruction of the land,
says Jeremiah,
is the outcome of human activity, and,
in terms we might use today,
a lack of human solidarity with creation.

*They turned it into a desolate place.
Desolate it cries out to me in mourning.
The whole country is desolate
because no one has a heart for the land.
(Jeremiah 12:11)*

The prophets describe
the apocalyptic “endings” to come
as a trembling of creation itself.
And although they face
the coming crisis realistically,
they are able to see beyond it in hope,
because creation itself will not end.
It is the brutal human systems
superimposed upon reality
which distort our relationships
with Earth and with each other
that will come to an end.

*For I am about to create
new heavens and a new earth!
The things of the past
will not be remembered or come to mind!....
They will not labor in vain
or bear children doomed to die....
There will be no harm, no destruction
anywhere in my holy mountain.
(Isaiah 65:17, 23; 11:9)*

These inevitable endings
will require the human family

to make radical changes
to the way we live together on this planet.
But through God’s faithfulness to God’s people,
and the people’s faithfulness to the covenant,
which has care of the land at its heart,
God will find a way for life to continue
in the face of death
and the systems that perpetuate it.

PUTTING JESUS IN HIS PLACE: THE JESUS MOVEMENT IN GALILEE¹¹²

Jesus of Nazareth was born
into a specific place and time,
into this story of God’s people, Israel,
inheriting that people’s history of struggle
to be faithful to God’s covenant.
Before he came to be understood
as the Savior of the World,
Jesus had a mission to a particular people
and to a particular place,
the region of Galilee in Palestine,
a seemingly unimportant
yet occupied territory
on the margins of the Roman empire.

Jesus’ mother, Mary,
was a young, rural peasant woman
who also inherited the history
of the struggle of her people.
Mary was visited by an angel
who invited her to take her place
in the story of the salvation of Israel.
She did not passively accept some “act of God”
but questioned the angel,
asserting her dignity as a full human being
and offering her “Yes” in freedom.¹¹³
As a strong, rural person open to the Spirit,
Mary also shows the importance
of being a woman,
a mother,
and an active, leading participant
in the struggle for liberation
and for a new creation.¹¹⁴

Jesus left Galilee during his early adulthood but returned there at a time of crisis after the arrest of John the Baptist.¹¹⁵ Today it is often taken for granted that young people will leave home, but in Jesus' time, this was less common, as it is still today in many places in Appalachia.¹¹⁶



Jesus seems to have gone away and come back with a new appreciation for the place he called home. With a critical, transforming love, Jesus returned and took his place in the story of his people. Like the prophets before him, he affirmed many of the stories and traditions of his people, but broke with others that got in the way of God's plan for fullness of life.

Jesus' ministry was to a people beaten down by their status as mere subjects in a deadly superpower. Making his way through the rural villages of the region, Jesus preached that God's reign was active and present in the here and now, bringing healing and nurturing new hope to a people who, like many of us in Appalachia, were

- economically poor
- worried about where the next meal would come from
- prone to despair about their options in life
- tempted to participate in social scapegoating
- paralyzed by their inability to imagine alternatives
- and violently repressed if they voiced opposition to their situation.¹¹⁷

Jesus invited Galilean villagers to take their place in the story of Israel, to take control of their lives and rebuild their communities according to their heritage of the covenant.

He called workers to "leave their nets" and to follow him,¹¹⁸ and he challenged the region's "middle class," such as tax collectors, to turn away from their involvement with injustice.¹¹⁹ In his parables, Jesus lifted up images and examples of a simple way of life and an economy based on sharing, mutual aid, and cooperation. In a time when powerful forces were tearing God's people apart and turning them against one another, Jesus returned home with a mission of *re-mem-bering* God's holy people, of knitting them back together again.¹²⁰

Many of the villagers were energized by Jesus' vision of renewal and joined his movement for revitalization, but Jesus' ideas were not appreciated by some family members and neighbors who believed he was stepping out of place, going against tradition and custom.¹²¹ And of course, as his message and community building became increasingly public

and confronted the temple system,
Jesus himself became a victim
of those forces that crucified the people,
taking his place in the story
of death and new life
proclaimed and lived by the prophets.

PRACTICING RESURRECTION IN CRUCIFIED PLACES

We believe Jesus was raised to new life
and we believe that new life is possible
anywhere that the stones of oppression
are rolled away from peoples and places.

Today we look around our world
and we cannot help but be moved,
and perhaps overwhelmed by,
the masses of crucified people,
the Body of Christ
which continues to suffer in history.¹²²
And it is true that Earth suffers
under the unbearable weight
of destructive human activity,
such as the overuse of resources.
We have really only begun to hear
and take to heart
the cry of the crucified Earth,
a planet that is undergoing
a Golgotha experience
that can only be described as ecocide.

But there are also specific *crucified places*,
wounds of Christ in our world
that affect both people and the land
in ways particular to their locations
and that cry out to be heard and felt.
We believe that new life for the planet
is inseparable from new life in crucified places.¹²³

Like Thomas the apostle,
we are called to come close
and touch these specific wounds
and then, following the way of Jesus
and the prophets,
to “practice resurrection,”¹²⁴

to look with hope beyond
the endings that these wounds represent
toward new life.

Many people of faith in Appalachia
have come to see the region
as one of these crucified places in our world.
Like Jesus’ Galilee,
the forces that crucify the land and people
of Appalachia are many.
But we continue to believe
and must not tire in stating
that Appalachia is still crucified by coal
and that coal industry executives
and their political partners are,
as Pope Francis says,
the Herods of today in our land.¹²⁵

King Coal is an empire,
a modern Tower of Babel
promoting itself as “the only game in town,”
though the false story of this monoconomy
is now beginning to crumble
as the industry faces a deepening crisis.

All empires crucify,
and as we watch King Coal’s tower crumble,
we begin to see the people
on whose backs it has been constructed:
people whose crosses vary,
but whose stories often connect back
to coal in one way or another.
And the crosses are many:

- the crosses of exploited miners
- the crosses of people without work
- the crosses of struggling single mothers
- the crosses of those suffering from addiction
- the crosses of young people who lack hope
and a sense of purpose
- and the crosses of those
who are scapegoated in their own communities
because of their race, ethnicity, or sexuality.

Despite the existence of these many crosses,
the power of King Coal

continues to captivate our imaginations and distort our sense of self-worth as a people. Just as Jesus' observers asked "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"¹²⁶ many of us in Appalachia tell ourselves that coal is all we have and we even accept the role ascribed to us as a people ready to sacrifice anything for the nation's energy demands.

Yet even as the empire of coal is falling, the practice of mountaintop removal continues to satiate our consumption habits. We must name these wounds as an earthly stigmata, as the crucifixion of the very body of God, and as the ultimate sacrament of spiritual death and our estrangement from nature, God, and each other.¹²⁷



For this reason, can anyone who sees with their own eyes the sheer destruction of mountaintop removal help but be reduced to silence as if kneeling before the crucified Christ? And when an Appalachian woman begs us to fix our gaze on the mountains that surround her home and to "look at what they've done,"¹²⁸

can we not hear scriptural echoes of the disfigured victim of Golgotha which still haunt the pages of our Bibles: "Behold the man."¹²⁹ "They will look on the one whom they have pierced"¹³⁰

There are Herods in this region, in positions of power in industry and politics, and they bear much of the responsibility for the crucifixions we experience here. But the rest of us cooperate with this crucifixion in various ways. Many of us are not among the elites but may play a managerial role in industries that harm both Earth and human beings. Still others of us are among the working classes, or we are women, youth, or the unemployed, who participate in crucifying the land and each other through our lifestyles or through the scapegoating of others different from ourselves.

We crucify Earth and each other in many ways.

But we believe in a God who brings the dead to life and who is bringing about a new heaven and a new Earth. And we believe that that new Earth will include a new Appalachia, and that God's holy mountain which the prophets envisioned can be established among the oldest of God's mountains on this planet.

However, belief in the possibility of resurrection in particular places requires concrete actions. Practicing resurrection means

taking our place in locations,
locations with faces, communities,
and stories of struggle.

Whether deliberately choosing
to “stay put” or to “come home,”
taking a stand with the poor
might involve taking one’s place
in the wounded communities
and regions of our world,
places like Appalachia,
as an act of geographical discipleship.
Members of our churches,
particularly religious sisters,
have lived lives of discipleship this way,
taking their place in Appalachia
over the last several decades.

Once we find our place,
resurrection begins to be possible
when we, like Thomas,
touch the wounds there.

When our coalfield communities
experience Good Friday and ask
“Are they trying to bury us alive”¹³¹
under the stones of overburden and flyrock,
of polluted water and air,
of poverty and addiction,
resurrection becomes thinkable
when we ask
“Who will roll back the stone?” (Mark 16:3)

Resurrection begins to happen
when our eyes
are opened,
like those of the disciples
on the road to Emmaus,¹³²
when we see that we are not
destined to be “sacrificial lambs,”
and that who we are as people
is much bigger
than the roles we are given
by the industries and politics
that have dominated our region
for over a century.¹³³

In the midst
of the human and ecological crisis
we face here in Appalachia,
resurrection *takes place* when we say
“We shall no longer be crucified
upon the cross of coal.”¹³⁴

THE SPIRIT, THE GIVER OF LIFE

Practicing resurrection in Appalachia
is to live life together in the Spirit.
Jesus lived in the Spirit,
he passed on the Spirit in his death,
and it was by the Spirit that he was raised.

Jesus has been present as Spirit
to his followers in the church.
Here in Appalachia,
our mountain church traditions
are places where the presence
of the Holy Spirit is celebrated tangibly,
where we experience Pentecost
not as an event in the past,
but as a power that flows through creation
and empowers communities
in their common life together.



The Spirit is God’s creative presence
and action in the universe
which brings everything into existence,
sustains each member’s life,
connects each part to the whole,

creates a reconciled diversity,
and restores life from brokenness.
She is that power in history
that calls the human family
forward together into oneness
with the Divine, with one another,
and with all the living things of Earth.¹³⁵

Though revealed by Jesus,
and in the Jewish story which shaped him,
human experience of the Spirit
is present among and beyond
all religions and cultures.
Although our religious traditions
sometimes try to constrain her,
the Spirit blows where she wishes,
in ways that radically overcome the divisions
human beings have created.

The Spirit is the Giver of Life
who actively resists the causes of domination
and the suffocation of possibility.
She is the freedom,
the wisdom,
and the courage
which enables those who dominate
to empty themselves of their arrogance,
which enables those who are devalued
to assert their dignity and worth,
which enables us to take our place in the story.¹³⁶

Our alienation from nature,
and the entire web of life,
is also an alienation from the Spirit.
Therefore, our ability
to make a new beginning
in Appalachia and around the world
hinges upon our ability
to become people of the Spirit once again.

Our survival on this planet,
and in the places we call home,
depends on our ability to become
attuned to the mystery
at the heart of creation.
That is, to become mystics.¹³⁷

Mystics are not a special group of people
within this or that religion,
nor is mysticism concerned
only with otherworldliness.¹³⁸

Mystics are simply people of the Spirit
whose love of God
flows outward in deep sensitivity
into love of the world
and an awareness of its suffering.
We are called to a mystical awareness
that the whole universe is charged
with the presence of the Spirit
and that all things are interconnected
as one community of creation.

Followers of Jesus
might express this by saying
that nature is God's first revelation,¹³⁹
that Earth itself is a sacrament,¹⁴⁰
or that all of creation is the Body of Christ.¹⁴¹
Most of the world's religions,
especially those of indigenous peoples,
share this deep awareness
of the sacredness of Earth
and the kinship that was intended
for the entire Earth community.¹⁴²
Even some people who do not claim
a religious tradition
are coming to sense that the crisis we face
is a spiritual problem that demands
a spiritual solution.¹⁴³

For mystics in tune
with the sacredness of Earth,
destruction of creation
is not merely an ecological problem
or a moral issue,
but sacramental sin,
a sin against the very presence of God.
For today's mystics,
the pollution of a river,
and of the water that is the source of life,
is an act of desecration no less severe
than pouring poison
in the Eucharistic chalice.¹⁴⁴
Indeed, our participation

in the sacrament of the Eucharist should make us painfully aware of the suffering presence of God in all creation.

Although mysticism involves a wide, inclusive view of creation, mysticism happens in local places and is rooted in the spirituality of the people.¹⁴⁵ Appalachian religion and culture are grounded by an earthy spirituality with a deep sense of the sacredness of the land and specific places, of particular mountains and rivers. As the late Appalachian activist Judy Bonds once said,

*We talk in human, living parts—
the mouth, the head,
the spine or backbone of the mountain,
the finger ridge.
We speak the language of a living,
breathing world....
[T]his landscape is a living,
breathing part of me.
I consider it something to protect,
like I would my own body.*¹⁴⁶

Mysticism is not merely inward-looking, but leads to prophetic action. Appalachian mystics have strong mentors who have gone before us whose vision of the sacredness of creation has led to action in the world. We can look, of course, to the wisdom of the ecological saints of the past, like St. Francis and St. Hildegard of Bingen. We can learn from saints of recent memory like Sister Dorothy Stang who show us what ecological discipleship looks like in the face of today's crisis.

But we also have our own Appalachian "saints," a cloud of witnesses that includes

- justice-seeking foremothers and forefathers like Mother Jones, Sid Hatfield, and Ollie "Widow" Combs
- contemporary ecological prophets like Judy Bonds and Larry Gibson
- and prophetic artists like Florence Reese and Hazel Dickens.

The lives of these mountain saints inspire us not because they embody some kind of prayer card perfection, but because of the way they transformed their awareness of suffering and injustice into action in a way that mirrors Jesus of Galilee.¹⁴⁷

The Spirit of God is upon us, as it was upon them, and as it was upon Jesus, to bring good news to those who have been made poor, including Earth. (Luke 4:16-19)
The Spirit is upon us to "restore the ancient ruins, and rebuild sites long devastated," to "repair the ruined cities, neglected for generations." (Isaiah 61:4)

The Spirit of empowerment and justice continually urges us:
*Forget the events of the past,
ignore the things of long ago!
Look, I am doing something new!
Now it springs forth—can't you see it?
I'm making a road in the desert
and setting rivers to flow in the wasteland.*
(Isaiah 43:18-19)

Likewise, we in these mountains believe that a new Appalachia is not only possible but is already beginning to grow in the shell of the old.¹⁴⁸

PART THREE

OUR ACTIONS: THE GROUND OF OUR HOPE

Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.
—Wendell Berry¹⁴⁹



As we reflect on the experience
of our people and of Earth itself
through the wisdom of our traditions,
we are compelled to act
because our capacity to become co-creators,
to change the stories in which we find ourselves,
is the ground of our hope.

Indeed, in our listening sessions
when we asked people
where they found signs of hope,
they often replied with very concrete examples
from their own communities
of people acting for change.
Many of us have begun
to take our place in the story,
refusing to be passive
and taking the initiative
to knit together a new regional story
in our cities and counties,
in our churches and neighborhoods,
in our families and as individuals.

Certainly many people in our region
and beyond
have begun to reflect deeply
on the global crises that are before us.
Inspired by the ecological movement,
and by the teachings of our churches,
we have begun to make changes
in our personal lifestyles,
greening the way we live and work
to better respect the gift of God's creation.

We celebrate the growing ecological movement
because it points to different ways of living
more in keeping with God's vision
for humanity and for Earth.
And yet,
here in Appalachia it becomes apparent
that buying green products
and making lifestyle changes is not enough
if mountains are still being leveled
and if the fossil fuel industry
maintains its stranglehold

on our communities, our politics,
and our planetary conditions.

As Pope Francis has written,
*A strategy for real change
calls for rethinking processes in their entirety,
for it is not enough to include
a few superficial ecological considerations
while failing to question the logic
which underlies present-day culture.*¹⁵⁰

Appalachian communities
have contributed to our ecological crisis
in many of the same ways
as other North Americans.
Yet some Appalachian traditions
have preserved ways of life
that are much more humble,
smaller in scale,
and in keeping with the kinship
intended for God's creation,
including household gardens
and other practices of homemaking.

Drawing on these traditions,
and creating new ones,
we in Appalachia have begun to feel our way
through the wilderness of a post-coal future.
In this wilderness,
we are learning to let go of the idolatries
of a culture obsessed
with more things and more profit.
We are learning to assert a self-worth
that transcends the role imposed on us
to provide the nation's energy.
And we are learning to walk
more humbly upon Earth,
taking our place in God's story
of the kinship of all creation.¹⁵¹

Repeating principles and values
is not enough to help us along
into the future together.
We have proclaimed principles before,
but it is now the time to act.
We offer here concrete examples

of ways communities in Appalachia are taking their place in the story, acting together to discern new ways of living together in this region and on this planet.

We do not offer final suggestions for action, and cannot do so, because our acting must always include learning, open to encounters with others and open to the truths we learn from Earth and from God.¹⁵²

Yet we believe that these examples are the experimental seeds of a new Appalachia and a new world, seeds that can be planted and tested in our own communities and contexts.

*“This Land is Home to Me” said
the Spirit of God
presses us
to ... recognize
that a new social order
is being born.*¹⁵³

People of faith in Appalachia still believe this is true, yet perhaps the birthing is taking place in ways other than initially expected. For our God is a God of surprises, and *it is the weak things of this world which seem like folly, that the Spirit takes up and makes its own.*¹⁵⁴

BECOMING APPALACHIAN MYSTIC ACTIVISTS

There are many ways that people of faith act together for a better Appalachia and a better world. Increasing numbers of people are becoming aware that living in the Spirit means becoming *activists*

as a way of putting into practice one’s faith in God’s coming community of creation.

The word “activism” is often met with suspicion in the church and in Appalachia. For many Christians, activism seems unrelated to, and even contrary to, the spiritual life. For many Appalachians, activists are seen as outsiders and “do-gooders” who have little relationship with the people or their communities.

But for others, activism, faith, and Appalachia are all a part of what it means to follow the Spirit in this place. We believe that Jesus showed us that life in the Spirit must be incarnate in our bodies and in our world. We believe that we are called to be the Body of Christ in the world and participants in God’s action in history.¹⁵⁵



Appalachian activism has a long history, and in the struggles of history and of today, being an activist is not a hobby or a luxury. People have decided to act, and to act boldly, because life depends on changing

the way we live together.
As Larry Gibson often said,
“We’re either going to be an activist,
or we’re going to be annihilated.”¹⁵⁶

Just as women were the first witnesses
to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection,
they have been practicing resurrection
at the forefront of Appalachian movements.
Many of the women who have
entered the world of activism
are mothers first
and have chosen to act in the name of life
for the survival of their children,
of babies in the womb,
and of future generations.¹⁵⁷
As Judy Bonds has said,
“I don’t think I chose to become an activist,
it was chosen for me....
I think it had to do with
how much injustice I was willing to accept.”¹⁵⁸

Appalachian people know
that major transformations are needed
in order for us to live in harmony
with Earth and with each other
as God intends.
Our movements must bring people together,
such as labor and eco-justice movements,
to work through their differences
and fight the forces
that are killing our communities
and our planet.

We are acting in the world
to birth a new Appalachia
through four major areas of transformation:

- Transforming the Basis of Life
- Transforming Communities
- Transforming Politics
- Transforming the Church.

In each area,
people are taking their place in the story,
continuing to take up the challenge

of “This Land is Home to Me”:
*The people themselves
must shape their own destiny.*¹⁵⁹

TRANSFORMING THE BASIS OF LIFE

Appalachian people have long known
that we cannot change
our world’s destructive course
without a deep transformation
in the very basis of the way we live life together.
We must shift away from
the consumer-driven market economy
to a sustenance economy¹⁶⁰
in which our desire for “more”
is replaced by satisfaction with “enough,”
living in kinship with the Earth community
and respectful of the limits of nature.



The Appalachian bishops
had much to say on the transition
to a sustainable way of life
in “At Home in the Web of Life.”

We will not repeat that message here, but we will reiterate the urgency with which we must act. As the bishops said twenty years ago, our choice is one between life and death.¹⁶¹

We also reiterate our conviction that, although we must grow in global awareness and solidarity, everything must at the same time become more local. We will have to learn to shift from the attempt to control and save the world to the practice of saving local places.¹⁶² Here we will highlight three areas in which this shift to the local is increasingly vital.

We are transforming our sources and consumption of **energy**. More and more people are saying no to the blasphemy of mountaintop removal and a misplaced faith in the future of coal. We are recognizing that coal industry practices are an immediate ecological emergency, threatening the integrity of Earth and the health of our communities. We are working inside and outside of institutions to conduct assessments of environmental and human health and to contribute to and share local knowledge.¹⁶³

Likewise, we urge against the simple replacement of coal with natural gas, not only because the ecological and health risks are similar to those of coal, but because we know that natural gas is another face of our addiction to fossil fuels. We know that climate change is a crisis we can avoid only by changing our way of life. We must turn to renewable energy sources and master our energy addiction through mindfulness, conservation, and efficiency. So our movements are working from below,

often without support from the political leaders, toward institutional divestment from fossil fuels and investment in renewable energy, such as through energy co-ops.¹⁶⁴

Directly connected to use of energy is the need to transform **technology**. In his ecological encyclical, Pope Francis has drawn our attention to the global technology-driven culture which produces mass quantities of new products for production's sake, the best example being our addiction to new personal electronic devices. The temptation to endlessly consume is one problem with our technology culture. A deeper problem is the fact that the true costs of our technologies are often hidden from our view, as well as the fact that so much technology is developed for the waging of violence against human beings and against Earth.

The development of appropriate technologies has been a concern in Appalachia for some time.¹⁶⁵ Technologies that are developed within appropriate limits are more respectful of nature, are potentially less costly to produce, and contribute to peace in a world of increasing conflict over the world's resources. Technology should serve people and Earth, not the other way around, and investment in appropriate technologies is more important than ever.

Finally, the way we choose to produce and transport **food** is at the heart of the way we live. Industrial agriculture harms Earth and treats animals, including humans, like mere machines, and global food distribution networks are a major contributor to climate change. In response, local communities in Appalachia are returning

to the practice of growing our own food through deep organic methods¹⁶⁶ and ethical pasture-based animal husbandry.¹⁶⁷ These movements are encouraging a shift away from unnatural foods and toward local, real food diets, many of them plant based, that reject the corporate industrial model and embrace God's model of the ecosystem where Earth is "[not] to be a desolation, but rather a place to be lived in." (Isaiah 45:18)

With women often at the forefront, community groups, churches, and non-profits such as

- the Appalachian Sustainable Agriculture Project
- Grow Appalachia
- Grow Ohio Valley
- and the Alderson Food Hub¹⁶⁸

are changing how we eat through community gardens, farmers markets, community supported agriculture (CSA) programs, co-op grocery stores, and mobile food markets. Such efforts are not an array of trendy new food products, but are transforming the way we live, literally at the very root, by creating new local food economies and by allowing people to know where their food comes from, food that is healthier for people, animals, and the planet.

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIES

Because food is so central to human life, the shifts we are seeing toward new food economies are at the center of revitalized communities in Appalachia. When food changes, other changes follow.

Having new, local sources of food does not only mean new products to buy, but it means new skills and new jobs which are so important in post-coal economies.¹⁶⁹

Wider discussions about Appalachia's post-coal future have been taking place, especially in suffering coal regions, but new conversations and new forms of cooperation are needed. Grassroots movements and community development efforts such as

- Step By Step, the Highland Educational Project, and What's Next, West Virginia? in West Virginia¹⁷⁰
- Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) and Appalachia's Bright Future in Kentucky¹⁷¹
- The Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee¹⁷²
- and the region-wide organization Appalachian Sustainable Development¹⁷³

are just some of the groups and initiatives leading the way.

However, it is difficult to imagine adequate transition for coal miners and their families without concrete proposals for new jobs for displaced miners. Some voices have called for a "jobs first agenda" which would provide alternative jobs to miners, guaranteed by state or federal government, including rebuilding infrastructure or repurposing mine and power plant sites.¹⁷⁴

Throughout Appalachia, people are taking their place in the story and making their communities centers of local production

rather than mere consumption.
We are producing food and energy,
taking part in city revitalization efforts,
and rethinking approaches to tourism.¹⁷⁵
We are producing art, music, and culture,
and engaging in the preservation
of our region's natural lands,
our cities' historic treasures,
and our peoples' shared history.¹⁷⁶
And the more we do so,
the stronger our communities become,
from below,
through new forms
of kinship, cooperation, and mutuality.



And yet, as we find our way,
we must seriously reckon with
barriers to renewed community life
that have harmed people in our region.
Sexism, racism, and classism
are all still present in our communities.
Criminal backgrounds
prevent some people from reintegrating
into the community
and beginning the process
of putting their lives back together.
We must continually seek out
those excluded from access
to the fullness of life and peace
of the community of creation.

In the midst of these challenges,
many of us in Appalachia

are moving beyond mourning
and are celebrating a new moment
in which the end of exploitative economies
is giving way to new opportunities
to shape our own destinies.

TRANSFORMING POLITICS

Many people in Appalachia
share a healthy suspicion of the political systems
through which our lives are organized,
whether local, regional, national, or global.
We believe that the work of transformation
cannot be done primarily
through these current systems
because they serve
the profitability of corporations
rather than people or Earth.
These systems are themselves
a major contributor to the crisis we face
and will not adjust easily
to the changes that must occur.

Democracy in this country is broken,
and this is perhaps most easy to see in Appalachia
where corporate money,
especially money from the fossil fuel industries,
controls political life
and divides society into polarized camps.
Despite deep corruption,
this political system must be engaged
because political decisions in the present
have a direct impact on the lives
of people and of Earth.
Yet, these systems must not only be engaged
but radically changed at their roots
if political life is ever to be placed
back into the hands of people,
and returned to a form
that respects the persons and the planet
it is intended to serve.

People in Appalachia are calling
for radical political change
in at least three areas.



First, we see very clearly the need to nurture participatory democracy in our region by getting corporate money out of politics, through legislation for fair voting rights, and through community education for democracy free of divisive rhetoric and propaganda.¹⁷⁷

Second, we urge a politics that serves people and Earth, not corporations.

In the spirit of Pope Francis, we are calling for a politics of what we might call *ecological mercy*. We call for laws which

- promote a sustainable energy policy by leaving fossil fuels in the ground, by divesting from dirty energy, by investing in renewable energy, and by committing to concrete policies to combat climate change
- protect the environment, especially water, and human health according to the “precautionary principle” which insists that “If objective information suggests that serious and irreversible damage may result, a project should be halted or modified, even in the absence of indisputable proof”¹⁷⁸

- and defend the dignity of the human person by instituting a living wage, the universal right to health care, and the right of workers to organize.

And third, we call for the transformation of the entire political system through new political and economic systems more in tune with Earth and the rights of all peoples:¹⁷⁹

- systems which no longer place money at the center, but the poor, including Earth
- systems which no longer place the protection of property at the center, but the protection of the commons of water, of land, and of air
- and systems which no longer place the rights of corporations at the center, but the rights of Earth which must be explicitly protected in law.¹⁸⁰

All the while, we must always remember that politics belongs to the people, not to great leaders or to political parties, and that local participation and creativity are where the “social poetry” of political life occurs, in Appalachia and elsewhere.¹⁸¹

TRANSFORMING THE CHURCHES

Finally, here in Appalachia, we are engaged in the hard work of transforming our churches into communities that serve God’s intentions for the entire community of creation. “Care of creation” has become a major concern across denominational lines, and communities have cooperated

in acts of service and justice
through groups like

- the Catholic Committee of Appalachia
- Christians for the Mountains
- Christian Appalachian Project
- the Thomas Merton Center
- and Interfaith Power & Light.¹⁸²

Groups like these
have taken their place in the story
as people of faith committed
to prophetic word and action
for justice and sustainability.¹⁸³

In the Roman Catholic tradition,
Appalachia has been a place
where the reforms of the Vatican II
and its call for a justice-seeking local church
have often been put into practice in creative ways.
Many communities of faith
throughout the region
continue to live out the vision
of the Appalachian pastorals
and of a faith that seeks justice
for the entire Earth community.

We lift up the many Appalachian ministries
that serve individuals and communities
on the underside of this regional
and global economy,
whether they be official church organizations
or grassroots initiatives.

We celebrate the continuing role
that Catholic Charities,
the various peace and justice offices,
prison ministries and addiction programs,
and state Councils of Churches
play in addressing the effects of poverty
and ecological injustice in this region.¹⁸⁴

We especially celebrate
the way entire church communities
have been founded or reoriented
in response to the message of our last pastoral,
“At Home in the Web of Life.”

That message of sustainable community
has led directly to the foundation
of new intentional communities,
each with its own mission in its own place,
and has nourished the ongoing mission
of more long-standing communities.



We think especially of Bethlehem Farm
in West Virginia,
the Mt. Tabor Benedictines in Kentucky,
and the Elder Spirit co-housing community in Virginia.
We celebrate the continuing tradition
of Appalachian Catholic Worker farms and houses
in both rural and urban communities
in Tennessee, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Ohio.¹⁸⁵

We think, too, of entire parishes
which have reflected deeply
on their environmental impact
and have undergone a conversion
into “eco-parishes.”
St. Eugene Catholic Church
in Asheville, North Carolina
provides an important model for parishes
in Appalachia and beyond.¹⁸⁶

Yet we know that renewal must continue, and we call for transformation in our Appalachian churches in six ways.

We desire, and commit to become:

- a church of the **poor** that listens first to the stories of the marginalized and excluded
- a church of **partnership** that holds all members as equals, that has rid itself of the sin of sexism, and that is inclusive of gays and lesbians, adjusting its structures of membership, leadership, and sacramental life to reflect this equality and inclusion¹⁸⁷
- a church that is **planetary**, at the service of God's entire community of creation and open to the diverse wisdom of all of God's people
- a church that is **placed**, rooted deep in the landscapes and cultures where we find ourselves and incarnating faith through local liturgical forms and local ways of discipleship¹⁸⁸
- a church that is **prophetic**, which is relevant to the world by announcing good news for the poor and denouncing social and ecological sin, whose leaders speak loudly of justice and refuse to be tempted into silence,¹⁸⁹ and whose members live Spirit-filled lives that show that another way of life is possible¹⁹⁰
- and a church of the Appalachian **pastorals**, remaining true to their radical vision of a church that listens first and seeks justice for Earth and its people.

This is the church we desire, and yet, we know that we are the church and that we must become the church we wish to see in the world, beginning now, here in Appalachia and beyond.

A MESSAGE TO YOUTH

Both of our previous pastorals contained a special message to young people who have always been a source of vision and energy in the region. Twenty-years ago, the Appalachian bishops noted the increasing numbers of young people who leave the region. Since that time, these numbers have worsened.

At the same time, many young people who leave Appalachia for education or employment opportunities have a shared sense of connection to home and a deep love of the region. Some young people stay connected through social media and even participate in movements for justice in Appalachia from a distance.

Others have chosen to come back to the communities they left to start businesses and projects which create new opportunities in the place they love. Some have even founded organizations to encourage young people to stay in Appalachia, such as Stay Together Appalachian Youth (STAY).¹⁹¹ Still others are dedicating their lives to service or to organizing, letting go of the pursuit of prestigious careers and taking their place in community development efforts

or in low-paying jobs to help organize justice in the workplace.

We note, too, the emergence of new forms of service and immersion trips taking place in the region. In many ways, these initiatives can be seen as a response to the call of Jesus to “Come and see.” (John 1:39) We encourage young people to continue on the way of conversion begun by these many trips. We invite the institutions which plan such opportunities to reflect deeply on the meaning and the forms of solidarity these experiences are meant to instill.



We celebrate all of these young people who in their own way are following the example of Jesus who took his place in Galilee with a mission of kinship and transformation.

We continue to believe in our youth, those “who have not given up hope, and who continue to believe in freshness in human experience.”¹⁹² We make a special invitation to you

to return to the region,
or to stay here,
to take your place in the story
of people of faith seeking justice
and the birth of a new Appalachia.

CONCLUSION

In this pastoral, we have given an update on the challenges facing our region in the context of a world in deep crisis. We have reflected on these stories and information through the lenses of our traditions, including the traditions of Appalachia itself. Reflection on these stories is so important, because, as Pope Francis reminds us,

*Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.*¹⁹³

We have suggested a number of concrete actions being taken throughout the region. We can learn deeply from these initiatives, because they have emerged from the very hearts of our communities.

While we have tried to be concrete in telling these stories of action, we realize that they are merely a starting point. We encourage the pastoral circle used in this document—a pattern of listening, then reflecting, then acting—to continue in diverse communities throughout the region. From that circle of reflection, we call for the development of local action plans

in dioceses, parishes, and organizations,
in neighborhoods and in workplaces.

But in our acting,
we must know that there are no easy answers,
no one solution to the problems we face,
no single economic savior to rescue us.
The time for these fantasies has passed.
We must forge relationships
and become comfortable
feeling our way in the dark with one another,
nurturing within us a *holy hope*
that pulls us beyond what we can see
and gives us assurance
that God's story is bigger
than the false stories by which we live.

Yet in God's grand story,
everyone must find a place,
and everyone's story,
including the story of Earth,
must be welcomed and honored
in its telling.
Each of us,
in the communities where we find ourselves,
are called to become "living pastorals":
listening deeply with the heart,
finding Christ's presence there,
and then acting boldly,
with others,
for God's Reign.

In order to create that
culture of encounter
where each member of creation
can find a home,
we must begin by asking
that deep, holy question:
What is it like to be you in this place?

That sacred question,
which is at the heart of this pastoral,
is an invitation to all of us
to get in touch with our own stories,
to listen deeply to the holy stories of others,
especially the poor of Earth,

to take our place in the story of creation,
and of Appalachia,
to let the telling take us home.

AFTERWORD: A NEW GENERATION'S PLACE IN THE STORY

As a high school student with a deep passion for social justice but skeptical that institutional religion had anything of value to contribute to these concerns, the Appalachian pastorals were nothing short of revolutionary. My exposure to them rooted me in a very different geography of the region I called home. They helped me to see being a West Virginian, or “Appalachian,” as an asset and something I could claim with joy. The Appalachian pastorals were honest about the challenges people in the region faced, but they insisted that ecological and economic exploitation—not people—were the problem. The pastorals also risked a little, much needed, romanticism by suggesting that Appalachia contained a promise, boldly flipping a script that insisted mainstream U.S. values as touted by the War on Poverty would “save” Appalachia. The pastorals suggested that Appalachian culture and traditions contained seeds of renewal for a deeply unjust socio-economic system. My own ecological conversion and sense of vocation took deep root in the mountains as result of these letters, shaping profoundly my hopes for the church, for Appalachia, and for the larger socio-ecological and economic systems of which they are a part.

As one voice among a new generation of social justice advocates taking our place in the story of the mountains and the pastorals, I give witness to our generation’s vision of Appalachia as a multifaceted place. Among my partners in tilling the soils of justice, I have seen efforts to tend to aspects of the Appalachian story that have remained buried. Once composted, these voices now bring new riches to the story the pastorals tell. Our Appalachia is many things; we claim Appalachia as a radiant mix of colors, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, and classes. Some of us are urban. Others are decidedly rural. Some of us have lived our lives in the mountains. Others have had to leave for various reasons. Others still have moved to the region and adopted Appalachia as a home. However, all of us share deep sense of rootedness in a place. This unites us in world in which globalized production and consumption has created an increasingly mobile and rootless way of interacting with Earth, which homogenizes places as much as it celebrates difference.

In the last year, I have encountered numerous news articles buzzing about a “post-coal” Appalachia. These articles speak about Appalachia as the epicenter of production for a new energy economy. What I experience on the ground in Appalachia is different. Those of us now coming of age in the mountains want to see Appalachia taking an empowered place in the global economy. We want to think beyond fueling the energy addiction of a consumer society—however renewable—and build something that gives life to and empowers our own diverse communities. A proliferation of grassroots organizations created with, and driven by, young people are seeking to nurture a different future that does not rely on the extraction of Appalachian energy. Our generation seeks to harness creative energy to fuel an Appalachia in which we feel able to stay or return, knowing there is a place for us.

This new pastoral lifts up these many voices and visions, and it is my prayer that it will speak to young Appalachians today, as the others spoke to previous generations. This pastoral invites us to listen to, and learn from, the memories of earlier efforts and till the soil of our own sense of connection and commitment to this land we call home. It is with much peace and joy that we stand within this new chapter in our shared story.

Eddie Sloane
Boston College doctoral candidate
Theology and Education
Wheeling, West Virginia

NOTES

¹ Utah Phillips, "The Telling Takes Me Home" is available on the album *The Telling Takes Me Home* (Rounder Records, 1997).

² Pope John Paul II, "Address to UN Conference on Health and Environment" (March 24, 1997), available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1997/march/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19970324_ambiente-salute.html.

³ Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, "This Land is Home to Me: A Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia by the Catholic Bishops of the Region" and "At Home in the Web of Life: A Pastoral Message on Sustainable Communities in Appalachia Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of This Land Is Home to Me from the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia." Citations of these Appalachian pastoral letters refer to their most recent printing, in one volume: *This Land is Home to Me (1975), At Home in the Web of Life (1995): Appalachian Pastoral Letters* (Martin, KY: Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 2007). Print and digital copies are available on the CCA website at <http://www.ccappal.org/publications/pastoral-letters>. For those unfamiliar with these two previous pastoral letters, the writing style of this present document follows the same "poetic" style of writing found in the 1975 and 1995 letters.

⁴ This image of "re-membering our history" comes from CCA founding member Marie Cirillo in early discussions about this "People's Pastoral."

⁵ Patrick Reinsborough and Doyle Canning, *Re:Imagining Change: How to Use Story-Based Strategy to Win Campaigns, Build Movements, and Change the World* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010); David C. Korten, *Change the Story, Change the Future: A Living Economy for a Living Earth* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2015).

⁶ Ched Myers, "From 'Creation Care' to 'Watershed Discipleship': Re-Placing Ecological Theology and Practice," *Conrad Grebel Review*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Fall 2014), 250-275.

⁷ The term "magisterium of the poor" was coined by Sri Lankan Jesuit theologian Aloysius Pieris. See, e.g., "An Asian Paradigm: Inter-Religious Dialogue and Theology of Religions," *The Month* (April 1993): 227-232; and *Liberación, inculturación, diálogo religioso* (Estella, 2001). Asian feminist theologians have developed this in terms of the "magisterium of poor women of Asia," e.g. Antoinette Gutzler, "From Whence Comes This Authority? The Ekklesia of Women in Asia: A New Magisterium For the Church," in Evelyn Montiero and Antoinette Gutzler, eds., *Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Gathering the Voices of the Silenced*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005), 160, cited in Sharon A. Bong, "The Ecclesia of Women in Asia: Liberating Theology," in *Feminist Catholic Theological Ethics: Conversations in the World Church*, ed. Linda Hogan and A.E. Orobator (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 64-71. Latin American theologians have used similar language in terms of the salvation that comes from the poor but also with regard to the "doctrinal authority" of the poor. See especially Jon Sobrino, "La autoridad doctrinal del pueblo

de Dios," *Concilium* 200 (1985): 71-81; and *No Salvation Outside the Poor: Prophetic-Utopian Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 34.

⁸ "This Land is Home to Me," 32.

⁹ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, no. 34, available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html (cited hereafter as "LS").

¹⁰ Margaret Swedish, *Living Beyond the "End of the World": A Spirituality of Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 146.

¹¹ 1 Cor. 12:4-11.

¹² In its document on the concept of the *sensus fidei*, the International Theological Commission writes, "Humble listening at all levels and proper consultation of those concerned are integral aspects of a living and lively church" (International Theological Commission, *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, no. 126, available at www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html). Pope Francis puts it this way in *Evangelii Gaudium* (cited hereafter as "EG"): "This is why I want a Church which is poor and for the poor. They have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them" (no. 198, available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

¹³ For more on the sacredness of the question "What is it like to be you," see the reflections of Jesuit Brendan Busse at *The Jesuit Post* website, e.g. "Lost and Found, or Homelessness and Grace," available at <https://thejesuitpost.org/2012/07/lost-and-found-homelessness-addiction-and-grace>; and "To Be a Better Lover," available at <https://thejesuitpost.org/2015/06/to-be-a-better-lover>.

¹⁴ John S. Rausch, "The True Cost of Mountaintop Removal" (2006), available from <http://www.ncrlc.com/corner-post-webpages/True-Cost-Mt-Removal.html%5D>.

¹⁵ "At Home in the Web of Life," 55.

¹⁶ This quote is from the late West Virginia activist Larry Gibson in B. J. Gudmundsson's short film "Keeper of the Mountains," released by Christians for the Mountains and Patchwork Films, 2006.

¹⁷ There are many resources online which provide the basics on mountaintop removal. One of the best is provided by the group Appalachian Voices at <http://ilovemountains.org/resources>. The list of recent writing on mountaintop removal continues to grow. Some of the most important, more in depth, studies are Eric Reece, *Lost Mountain: A Year in the Vanishing Wilderness: Radical Strip Mining and the Devastation of Appalachia* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006); Shirley Stewart Burns, *Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal on Southern West Virginia Communities* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University

Press, 2007); Tom Butler and George Wuerthner, eds., *Plundering Appalachia: The Tragedy of Mountaintop-Removal Coal Mining* (San Rafael, CA: Earth Aware, 2009); Rebecca R. Scott, *Removing Mountains: Extracting Nature and Identity in the Appalachian Coalfields* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

¹⁸Comments made by Larry Gibson in "Keeper of the Mountains."

¹⁹This story comes from a Roman Catholic religious sister, community organizer, and women's advocate in rural Virginia.

²⁰The CCA-related initiative "In Praise of Mountain Women" created a community of women to discuss their experiences in the region and to nurture a sense of empowerment toward social change. See also Shannon Elizabeth Bell, *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed: Appalachian Women and the Fight for Environmental Justice* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

²¹Numerous testimonies of communities living close to mining projects are readily available online. Two very helpful collections were produced from extensive interviews conducted by CCA member and long-time native Appalachian activist Carol Warren. The booklets were co-sponsored by CCA, the West Virginia Council of Churches, the West Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), and Christians for the Mountains. See Carol Warren, ed., *Like Walking Onto Another Planet: Stories About the TRUE Impacts of Mountaintop Removal Mining* (Huntington, WV: Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, 2006), available at http://ohvec.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/ovec_mtrbooklet.pdf; and Carol Warren, ed., *Mountaintops Do Not Grow Back: Stories of Living in the Midst of Mountaintop Removal Strip-Mining* (Huntington, WV: Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, 2008), available at http://ohvec.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/mountaintops_do_not_grow_back.pdf.

²²M. Hendryx and M. Ahern, "Mortality in Appalachian Coal Mining Regions: The Value of Statistical Life Lost," *Public Health Reports* 124 (July-August 2009): 541–50; L. Cain and M. Hendryx, "Learning Outcomes Among Students in Relation to West Virginia Coal Mining: An Environmental 'Riskscape' Approach," *Environmental Justice* 3 (2010): 71–77; M.A. Palmer, et al., "Mountaintop Mining Consequences," *Science* 327 (8 January 2010): 148–9; K.J. Zullig and M. Hendryx, "A Comparative Analysis of Health-Related Quality of Life (HRQOL) for Residents of US Counties With and Without Coal Mining," *Public Health Reports*, 125 (2010): 548–555; P. Epstein, et al., "Full Cost Accounting for the Life Cycle of Coal," *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1219 (2011): 73–98; M. Hendryx, et al., "Self-Reported Cancer Rates in Two Rural Areas of West Virginia with and Without Mountaintop Coal Mining," *Journal of Community Health*, 24 July 2011, available at http://www.motherjones.com/files/final_jch_cancer_2011.pdf; M. Ahern, et al., "The Association Between Mountaintop Mining and Birth Defects Among Live Births in Central Appalachia, 1996–2003," *Environmental Research* 111, no. 6 (August 2011): 838–46; M. Hendryx, "Poverty and Mortality Disparities in Central Ap-

palachia: Mountaintop Mining and Environmental Justice," *Journal of Health Disparities Research and Practice* 4, no. 3 (2011): 50–59; K. Zullig and M. Hendryx, "Health-Related Quality of Life Among Central Appalachian Residents in Mountaintop Mining Counties," *American Journal of Public Health* 101 (2011): 848–853; M. Hendryx, F. Fulk, and A. McGinley, "Public Drinking Water Violations in Mountaintop Coal Mining Areas of West Virginia, USA," *Water Quality, Exposure and Health* 4 (2012): 169–175. For links to many of these studies and more, see http://ohvec.org/issues/mountaintop_removal/articles/health.

²³This example comes to us from the ministry of CCA's former Director, Fr. John Rausch. He has reflected on the community's response to the flooding in many of his writings, including "The Cross in the Mountains: Mountaintop Removal in Appalachia," *Sacred Acts: How Churches are Working to Protect Earth's Climate* (Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2012), 152–153.

²⁴The term was coined by Glenn Albrecht. See "Global Solastalgia," available at <http://healthearth.blogspot.com/2008/08/global-solastalgia.html>.

²⁵M. Hendryx, and K.A. Innes-Wimsatt, "Increased Risk of Depression for People Living in Coal Mining Areas of Central Appalachia, USA," *Ecopsychology*, 5, no. 3 (2013): 179–187.

²⁶This is part of the story of Keeper of the Mountains, the non-profit started by the late Larry Gibson of Kayford Mountain in West Virginia.

²⁷"Justice for Miners & their Families: A Statement from Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice on the Threat to Health-Benefits of Workers Presently or Formerly Employed by Peabody Energy, Patriot Coal, Arch Coal, or Magnum Coal," (26 February 2013), available at http://www.catholic-scholarsforworkerjustice.org/2013-02-26_SOS_Justice_for_Miners_and_Families.pdf.

²⁸Governor's Independent Investigation Panel, *Upper Big Branch: The April 5, 2010, Explosion: A Failure of Basic Coal Mining Safety Practices*, Report to the Governor, J. Davitt McAteer, et al. (2011), available at <http://www.nttc.edu/ubb>. See also The United Mine Workers of America, "Report on the Sago Mine Disaster of January 2, 2006," (March 15, 2007), available at <http://www.umwa.org/files/documents/Sagoreport.pdf>. See also Peter A. Galuszka, *Thunder on the Mountain: Death at Massey and the Dirty Secrets Behind Big Coal* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012).

²⁹At the time of this writing, former CEO of Massey Energy Don Blankenship has been convicted of conspiring to violate mine safety regulations at the Upper Big Branch Mine in West Virginia. For detailed coverage of the trial, see the writing of Ken Ward, Jr. at *The Charleston Gazette's* "Coal Tattoo" blog at <http://blogs.wvgazette.com/coalattoo>.

³⁰Chris Hanby, "Black Lung Surges Back in Coal Country," *The Center for Public Integrity* (July 8, 2012), available at <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2012/07/08/9293/black-lung-surges-back-coal-country>.

³¹In West Virginia, industry statistics show a decrease in mining jobs from 130,457 in 1940 to 19,427 in 2013 (West Virginia Coal Association statistics cited in Dennis Sadowski,

"Despite Long Mining History, Poverty Straps Many in West Virginia," *National Catholic Reporter/Catholic News Service* [Nov. 4, 2014], available at <http://ncronline.org/blogs/eco-catholic/despite-long-mining-history-poverty-straps-many-west-virginia>. Between 2011 and early 2014 alone, 5,000 coal jobs were cut in the state (West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy, "The State of Working West Virginia 2014: Economic Recovery and Transition in the Mountain State: State's Energy Economy Shifts North," available at <https://www.afsc.org/sites/afsc.civicaactions.net/files/documents/Report-state-working-west-va-2014.pdf>). In Kentucky, the story is the same. Thirty years ago, coal employed about 48,000 in the state. Today, the industry employs about 10,000 ("Report: Kentucky Lost More Than 1 in 10 Coal Jobs During First Three Months of 2015," *Lexington Herald-Leader* [April 30, 2015], available at <http://www.kentucky.com/news/business/article44597049.html>).

³²Eve S. Weinbaum, *To Move a Mountain: Fighting the Global Economy in Appalachia* (New York: The Free Press, 2004).

³³West Virginia has seen an increase in the number of federal prisons in recent years. See Tracy Huling, "Building a Prison Economy in Rural America" in *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*, Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, eds. (New York: The New Press, 2002). Communities like Oak Ridge, Tennessee are centers for weapons research and manufacturing. Richmond, Kentucky is home to a large stockpile of aging chemical weapons, the disposal of which has been under discussion by the Pentagon, Congress, and local organizations (Dan Radmacher, "Disposing of a Chemical Past," *Appalachian Voices Blog* [August 6, 2015], available at <http://appvoices.org/2015/08/06/disposing-of-a-chemical-past-kentucky-chemical-weapons-stockpile-slated-for-destruction-by-2023>).

³⁴West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy, "The State of Working West Virginia 2014."

³⁵The experience of families living in "food deserts" informs the work of groups like Grow Ohio Valley in Wheeling, West Virginia and the Alderson Food Hub in Alderson, West Virginia, as well as Grow Appalachia which works throughout the region. See the website of Grow Appalachia at <http://growappalachia.berea.edu/history-goals>.

³⁶The following two paragraphs are drawn from listening sessions with rural parishes and community members in Preston and McDowell counties in West Virginia.

³⁷Dan Barry, "As the Mountaintops Fall, a Coal Town Vanishes," *New York Times* (April 12, 2011), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/13/us/13lindytown.html>.

³⁸Sue Ella Kobak, "OxyContin Flood in the Coalfields: Searching for Higher Ground," in *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia*, edited by Stephen L. Fisher and Barbara Ellen Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 198-209. See also Mike Mariani, "Poison Pill: How the American Opiate Epidemic was Started by One Pharmaceutical Company," *Pacific Standard* (Feb. 23, 2015), available at [ican-opiate-epidemic-was-started-by-one-pharmaceutical-company; Olga Khazan, "The New Heroin Epidemic," *The Atlantic* \(Oct. 30, 2014\), available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/10/the-new-heroin-epidemic/382020/>.](http://www.psmag.com/health-and-behavior/how-the-amer-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

³⁹This section's voices come from women and men in prison, and from advocates who work in the prison systems, in West Virginia and Virginia.

⁴⁰Madelon L. Finkel and Adam Law, "The Rush to Drill for Natural Gas: A Public Health Cautionary Tale," *American Journal of Public Health* 101, No. 5 (May 2011).

⁴¹The Bush-Cheney Energy Policy Act of 2005 paved the way for research and exploration. See "President Signs Energy Policy Act," (August 8, 2005), available at <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/08/20050808-6.html>. See also the 2009 documentary *Split Estate* by Debra Anderson. The film's website is <http://www.splitestate.com> and the film is available to stream at http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/split_estate.

⁴²At the time of this writing, there are about 1.7 million active oil and gas wells in the United States. Data is updated continually by the non-profit organization FracTracker. See statistics at <http://www.fractracker.org>.

⁴³For a concise reference to federal regulation for oil and gas, see http://www.oilandgasbmps.org/laws/federal_law.php. See also Paige Campbell, "Plundering Private Property Rights," *Appalachian Voices Blog* (June 11, 2012), available at <http://appvoices.org/2012/06/11/plundering-private-property-rights>; Eric Ellman, "The Fractured State of Gas Shale Development Regulation," *Penumbra*, Yale Climate & Energy Institute, available at <http://climate.yale.edu/penumbra/fractured-state-gas-shale-development-regulation>; as well as the April/May 2015 issue of *The Appalachian Voice*, available at <http://appvoices.org/thevoice/2015-issue-2-aprilmay>.

⁴⁴Horrific reports of sexual assault have been documented in oil and gas communities in North Dakota, particularly those near Native communities. For some of these reports, see Mary Annette Pember, "Brave Heart Women Fight to Ban Man-Camps, Which Bring Rape and Abuse," *Indian Country Today Media Network* (Aug. 28, 2013), available at <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2013/08/28/brave-heart-women-fight-ban-man-camps-which-bring-rape-and-abuse-151070>; Peter Rugh, "Inside Fracking's 'Man Camps', Where Sex, Drugs, and Gonorrhea Run Rampant" (Oct. 18, 2013), available at <http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/inside-frackings-man-camps-where-sex-drugs-and-gonorrhea-run-rampant>; Damon Buckley, "Firsthand Account Of Man Camp In North Dakota From Local Tribal Cop" (May 22, 2014), available at http://www.lakotacountrytimes.com/news/2014-05-22/Front_Page/Firsthand_Account_Of_Man_Camp_In_North_Dakota_From.html; and Sari Horwitz, "Dark Side of the Boom," *The Washington Post* (Sept. 28, 2014), available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2014/09/28/dark-side-of-the-boom/>. A listening session with an anti-fracking activist in Pennsylvania included the story of prostitutes being flown in by the plane-full to a North Dakota oil and gas community.

⁴⁵ General information on the fracking process and its effects is drawn from Finkel and Law as well as “What’s in the Water?,” a pamphlet produced by Damascus Citizens for Sustainability. The website of Damascus Citizens contains a massive database of technical information on the oil and gas industry. See <http://www.damascuscitizensforsustainability.org/gas-drilling-tech-notes-directory>. The late Dr. Theo Colborn was a leading expert on the effects of chemicals on the environment and human health, and much of her work focused on the oil and gas industry. See the website of the Endocrine Disruption Exchange, an organization she founded, at <http://www.endocrinedisruption.org>.

⁴⁶ We must also mention that the process also requires large amounts of sand. Frack sand mining, a form of strip mining, has become an industry itself in some parts of the country, the ecological and social effects of which are similar to those of mountaintop removal coal mining. See the website of Damascus Citizens for Sustainability at <http://damascuscitizens.org/frac-sand>.

⁴⁷ For stories from Pennsylvania, see *Shalefield Stories: Personal and Collected Testimonies* published by the Shalefield Stories Campaign in January 2014. A second volume is now available. For information, see <http://www.shalefieldstories.org>. For stories from West Virginia, see the documentaries *In the Hills and Hollows* (<http://www.inthehillsandhollows.com>) and *Battle for Wetzel County* (http://www.snagfilms.com/films/title/battle_for_wetzel_county). For a national view of the natural gas industry, see the film *Split Estate*. See also the series of films by Josh Fox, *Gasland* (2010), *Gasland Part II* (2012), and *Gaswork* (2015). For info, see <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com> and <http://www.gasworkfilm.com>.

⁴⁸ Substances released into the water and air can include methane, arsenic, hydrogen sulfide, mercury, acetone, benzene, ethylbenzene, n-hexane, toluene, xylene.

⁴⁹ For example, see the website Energy Speaks, particularly its fact sheet section, at <http://energyspeakswv.com/Resources/Fact-Sheets.aspx>.

⁵⁰ Nicknamed the “Halliburton loopholes,” these exemptions established by the Energy Policy Act of 2005 free the oil and gas industry from the constraints of the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA); the Clean Air Act (CAA); the Clean Water Act (CWA); the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA); the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA); the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); and the Toxic Release Inventory of the Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act (EPCRA). See “Loopholes for Polluters – The Oil and Gas Industry’s Exemptions to Major Environmental Laws” (May 2011), available at https://www.earthworksaction.org/library/detail/loopholes_for_polluters. See also “The Halliburton Loophole” at https://www.earthworksaction.org/issues/detail/inadequate_regulation_of_hydraulic_fracturing.

⁵¹ Early EPA studies of fracking were found wanting by environmentalist and health groups. See the Oil & Gas Accountability Project’s 2005 study “Our Drinking Water at Risk: What EPA and the Oil and Gas Industry Don’t Want Us to Know About Hydraulic Fracturing,” available at https://www.earthworksaction.org/index.php/library/detail/our_drinking_water_at_risk.

The draft of the most recent EPA report can be found at <http://www2.epa.gov/hfstudy>. The report was immediately widely celebrated by the oil and gas industry as “confirming” that fracking is safe. The EPA later clarified that the report states that current data is “insufficient,” and that the report should not be interpreted to mean that fracking does not contaminate water supplies. For a good follow-up report, see Ken Ward, Jr., “EPA Says New Study Doesn’t Show Fracking is Safe,” *Charleston Gazette-Mail* (June 7, 2015), available at <http://www.wvgazette.com/article/20150607/GZ01/150609432/1419>.

⁵² One such public hearing on fracking was held in Wheeling, West Virginia in February 2015, sponsored by the Clifford J. Lewis Appalachian Institute at Wheeling Jesuit University.

⁵³ These stories are drawn from a listening session with Catholic anti-fracking activist Ron Gulla from Washington County, Pennsylvania.

⁵⁴ Some studies suggest that the carbon footprint of oil and gas is not significantly less than that of coal, as industry experts and politicians assert, and might, in fact, be much worse. See Robert W. Howarth, “A Bridge to Nowhere: Methane Emissions and the Greenhouse Gas Footprint of Natural Gas,” *Energy Science & Engineering* 2, No. 2 (June 2014): 47–60, available at http://www.eeb.cornell.edu/howarth/publications/Howarth_2014_ESE_methane_emissions.pdf; Christina Nunez, “Switch to Natural Gas Won’t Reduce Carbon Emissions Much, Study Finds,” *National Geographic* (Sept. 25, 2014), available at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/energy/2014/09/140924-natural-gas-impact-on-emissions/>.

⁵⁵ These stories come from a listening session conducted by a woman CCA member in Cherokee, North Carolina and via email from a male Native prison chaplain and CCA member. These stories resonate with the experiences of Native peoples throughout North America. See Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird, eds., *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 2005).

⁵⁶ bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

⁵⁷ This testimony comes from a CCA member and organic farmer in Summers County, West Virginia.

⁵⁸ CCA issued a “Statement on Systemic Racism and Police Violence Against People of Color” during the Christmas season of 2014, on December 28th, the Feast of the Holy Innocents. The statement is available at <http://www.ccappal.org/publications/statements-resolutions/systemic-racism-police-violence-against-people-of-color>.

⁵⁹ The stories in this paragraph come from the Spanish speaking Roman Catholic community in Asheville, North Carolina.

⁶⁰ Alex Hannaford, “Growing Up Gay and Transgendered in Appalachia,” *The Atlantic* (April 30, 2011), available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/04/growing-up-gay-and-transgendered-in-appalachia/238047>.

⁶¹ Karen L. Cox, "We're Here, We're Queer, Y'all," *New York Times* (Oct. 3, 2012), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/04/opinion/were-here-were-queer-yall.html>. See also Lori Rotenberk, "Raise the Flag High: Queer Farming in Rural America," *Modern Farmer* (January 22, 2015), available at <http://modernfarmer.com/2015/01/raise-flag-high-queer-farming-rural-america>.

⁶² Silas House, "Small Towns, Small Hearts: The Battle for Gay Rights in Rural America," *New York Times* (October 22, 2014), available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/23/opinion/the-battle-for-gay-rights-in-rural-america.html>.

⁶³ The voices present in the following two paragraphs come from participants in a retreat for gay and lesbian Catholics in Virginia.

⁶⁴ Tim McDonnell, "Coal Companies Are Dying While Their Execs Grab More Cash," *Mother Jones* (Sept. 2, 2015), available at <http://www.motherjones.com/environment/2015/09/coal-executives-salaries-bonuses-stock>.

⁶⁵ "This Land is Home to Me," 16.

⁶⁶ Comments made by Larry Gibson in "Keeper of the Mountains."

⁶⁷ Activists and analysts have viewed Appalachia as a "sacrifice zone" for decades. For a recent take on sacrifice zones, including Appalachia, in the context of global imperial capitalism, see Chris Hedges and Joe Sacco, *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt* (New York: Nation Books, 2012).

⁶⁸ "This Land is Home to Me," 17.

⁶⁹ Pope Francis has repeatedly pointed to the deadly reality of the global economy. For an excellent summary and analysis, see Andrea Torielli and Giacomo Galeazzi, *This Economy Kills: Pope Francis on Capitalism and Social Justice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015).

⁷⁰ Denise Giardina, "Land: A Theological Reflection," in *Dream of the Mountains' Struggle: Appalachian Pastoral Five Years Later*, ed. Joseph R. Hacula (Prestonburg, KY: Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 1980), 50.

⁷¹ Naomi Klein, *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 25. See also Jeff Goodell, *Big Coal: The Dirty Secret Behind America's Energy Future* (Boston: Mariner/Houghton Mifflin, 2006).

⁷² While we know, scientifically, mathematically, that any more global warming beyond 2-degrees Celsius will bring about catastrophic changes in weather and sea levels, many experts predict that we are actually gearing up for a 4-degree or even 6-degree increase in warming which is likely to lead to unpredictable effects. See Bill McKibben, "Global Warming's Terrifying New Math," *Rolling Stone*, 19 July 2012, available at <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/global-warmings-terrifying-new-math-20120719>. See also Klein, 12-15.

⁷³ "At Home in the Web of Life," 65-66.

⁷⁴ Klein, 25.

⁷⁵ Korten, *Change the Story, Change the Future*.

⁷⁶ Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961), 31.

⁷⁷ Winona LaDuke, "In the Time of the Sacred Places," in *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, ed. Llewellyn

Vaughan-Lee (Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013), 85-100.

⁷⁸ Swedish, *Living Beyond the "End of the World"*, xxiv.

⁷⁹ A good example of serious, deep engagement between indigenous and Christian voices, originating from but not limited to the Mennonite tradition, is Steve Heinrichs, ed. *Buffalo Shout, Salmon Cry: Conversations on Creation, Land Justice, and Life Together* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 2013). See also Winona LaDuke, *Recovering the Sacred: The Power of Naming and Claiming* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005).

⁸⁰ See, in particular, the work of Thomas Berry and Ilia Delio.

⁸¹ A strong, early, and influential articulation of this view from a Latin American viewpoint is Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, Phillip Berryman, trans. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

⁸² See, e.g., Dorothy Boorse, *Loving the Least of These: Addressing a Changing Environment, A Conversation Piece from the National Association of Evangelicals* (2011), available at <http://nae.net/loving-the-least-of-these>; Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, ed., *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth* (Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013).

⁸³ Pope John Paul II, "Peace With God, Peace With All of God's Creation," World Day of Peace Message (January 1, 1990), available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html.

⁸⁴ Pope John Paul II, "Peace With God, Peace With All of God's Creation."

⁸⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, "If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," World Day of Peace Message (January 1, 2010), no. 8,), available at https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace.html.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 14.

⁸⁷ Joshua J. McElwee, "Pope Francis: 'I would love a church that is poor'," *National Catholic Reporter* (March 16, 2013), available at <http://ncronline.org/blogs/francis-chronicles/pope-francis-i-would-love-church-poor>.

⁸⁸ Good summaries of the overall meaning of Pope Francis' papacy include Austen Ivereigh, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope* (New York: Henry Holt, 2014); Leonardo Boff, *Francis of Rome, Francis of Assisi: A New Springtime for the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015); Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives* (New York: Paulist Press, 2015).

⁸⁹ EG, no 53.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ EG, no 55.

⁹² EG, no 53.

⁹³ EG, no 56.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ LS, no. 117.

⁹⁶ Pope Francis, "Address of the Holy Father to the United Nations" (Sept. 25, 2015), available at <https://w2.vatican>.

va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html.

⁹⁷ LS, no. 117.

⁹⁸ LS, no. 139.

⁹⁹ Pope Francis, "Address of the Holy Father to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements" (July 9, 2015), available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150709_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html.

¹⁰⁰ EG, no. 181.

¹⁰¹ See, again, *Evangelii Gaudium*: "The Church is called to be the house of the Father, with doors always wide open. One concrete sign of such openness is that our church doors should always be open, so that if someone, moved by the Spirit, comes there looking for God, he or she will not find a closed door.... [T]he Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems" (EG, no. 47). "We have to state, without mincing words, that there is an inseparable bond between our faith and the poor" (EG, no. 48). "I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security. I do not want a Church concerned with being at the centre and which then ends by being caught up in a web of obsessions and procedures" (EG, no. 49). For a good summary of the theme of mercy in Francis' papacy, see Walter Kasper, "Mercy—The Key Word of His Pontificate," in *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love*, 31-36.

¹⁰² "[N]either the Pope nor the Church have a monopoly on the interpretation of social realities or the proposal of solutions to contemporary problems. Here I can repeat the insightful observation of Pope Paul VI: 'In the face of such widely varying situations, it is difficult for us to utter a unified message and to put forward a solution which has universal validity. This is not our ambition, nor is it our mission. It is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country'" (EG, no. 184).

¹⁰³ Pope Francis, "Address of the Holy Father to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements."

¹⁰⁴ "Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world" (EG, no. 11).

¹⁰⁵ This description of an agrarian, creation-centered reading of the Hebrew scriptures is based, in part, on Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Wes Howard-Brook, "Come Out, My People!" *God's Call Out of Empire in the Bible and Beyond* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), as well as the work of Ched Myers and Walter Brueggemann.

¹⁰⁶ Genesis 1:13.

¹⁰⁷ See chapter 1 of Howard-Brook, 13-21.

¹⁰⁸ Genesis 11:1-9. See Howard-Brook, 47-51.

¹⁰⁹ Exodus 16. See chapter 4 of Davis, 66-79.

¹¹⁰ Leviticus 26: 3-4, 6, 9, 12.

¹¹¹ 1 Samuel 8.

¹¹² The title of this section is taken from Halvor Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

¹¹³ Luke 1:46-56.

¹¹⁴ Caroline N. Mbonu, "Drawn from the Shadows: The Significance of the Galilean Mary for Women in Igbo Society," in *Jesus of Galilee: Contextual Christology for the 21st Century*, ed. Robert Lassalle-Klein (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 135-148; Leonardo Boff, *Come, Holy Spirit: Inner Life, Giver of Life & Comforter of the Poor*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015), 71.

¹¹⁵ Mark 6:1-5; Matthew 13:54-58; Luke 4:16-30.

¹¹⁶ These paragraphs on Jesus' departure from and return to Galilee are drawn from Moxnes, *Putting Jesus in His Place*; Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey: The Mexican-American Experience*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); and Sean Freyne, "Jesus in Context: Galilee and Gospel," in *Jesus of Galilee: Contextual Christology for the 21st Century*, ed. Robert Lassalle-Klein (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

¹¹⁷ Richard A. Horsley, *Jesus and Empire: The Kingdom of God and the New World Disorder* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003).

¹¹⁸ Mark 1:16-20; Matthew 4:18-22.

¹¹⁹ Mark 2:13-17; Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32.

¹²⁰ Horsley.

¹²¹ Mark 3:21, 31-34; 6:1-6.

¹²² Ignacio Ellacuría, "The Crucified People," in *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993).

¹²³ Ched Myers, "From 'Creation Care' to 'Watershed Discipleship'"; Ched Myers, "A Watershed Moment," *Sojourners* (May 2014), available at <http://www.chedmyers.org/awatershedmoment>.

¹²⁴ Wendell Berry, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front," in *A Country of Marriage: Poems* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), 14-15.

¹²⁵ Pope Francis, "Homily for the Mass for the Inauguration of the Pontificate" (March 19, 2013), available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html. Francis here echoes Pope John Paul II, who said "The environment has often fallen prey to the interests of a few strong industrial groups, to the detriment of humanity as a whole, with the ensuing damage to the balance of the ecosystem, the health of the inhabitants and of future generations to come..." ("Address to UN Conference on Health and Environment").

¹²⁶ John 1:46.

¹²⁷ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

¹²⁸ Comments made by Maria Gunnoe in B. J. Gudmundson's short film "Look What They've Done," released by

Christians for the Mountains and Patchwork Films, 2006.

¹²⁹ John 19:5. The translation of this verse is from the *New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition*, copyright © 1989, 1993 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹³⁰ John 19:37.

¹³¹ Comments made by Maria Gunnoe in "Look What They've Done."

¹³² Luke 24:13-35.

¹³³ Comments made by Maria Gunnoe in "Look What They've Done."

¹³⁴ Jeff Biggers, "Mass Arrests in DC: We Shall No Longer Be Crucified Upon the Cross of Coal," *CommonDreams.org* (Sept. 27, 2010), available at <http://www.commondreams.org/news/2010/09/27/mass-arrests-dc-we-shall-no-longer-be-crucified-upon-cross-coal>.

¹³⁵ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993); Boff, *Come, Holy Spirit*.

¹³⁶ For more on the two-sided nature of sin which encompasses both selfishness and self-negation, see Traci C. West, *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006).

¹³⁷ "The devout Christian of the future will either be a 'mystic,' one who has experienced 'something,' or he will cease to be anything at all" (Karl Rahner, "Christian Living Formerly and Today," in *Theological Investigations VII*, trans. David Bourke [New York: Herder and Herder, 1971], 15).

¹³⁸ Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*, Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

¹³⁹ Creation as God's first revelation is a key theme in "At Home in the Web of Life."

¹⁴⁰ The view of Earth as sacrament is strong in the writing and spirituality of Pope Francis, inspired by the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi.

¹⁴¹ McFague, *The Body of God*.

¹⁴² Vaughan-Lee, ed., *Spiritual Ecology*.

¹⁴³ Spirituality is connecting some conservatives and radicals in eco-justice movements in Appalachia. Observers like Tricia Shapiro have noted that some activists who do not adhere to institutional religion have what they describe as a spiritual connection with nature, so the destruction of land and oppression of human communities is therefore seen as a spiritual problem. Spiritual songs and prayers, then, are often a part of protests in the coalfields. See Tricia Shapiro, *Mountain Justice: Homegrown Resistance to Mountaintop Removal, for the Future of Us All* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2010), 94, 102-103.

¹⁴⁴ This image came from a conversation with an Orthodox monk currently living in Martins Ferry, Ohio.

¹⁴⁵ Pope Francis affirms the importance of the "people's mysticism" of popular traditions which authentically breathe the Gospel into local communities. See EG, nos. 122-126.

¹⁴⁶ Taylor Lee Kirkland, "Mountain Memories: Interview with Judy Bonds," *Yes! Magazine* (Jan. 7, 2011), available at <http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/inter->

[view-with-judy-bonds](http://www.yesmagazine.org/people-power/inter-view-with-judy-bonds).

¹⁴⁷ The Appalachian sense of justice as "saintly" is well captured in the fictionalized words of Sid Hatfield in Jean Battlo's play *Terror of the Tug: The Battle of Matewan/The McDowell Murders* (McArts, 2006): "[I]n my young days, I liked some good things like drinking and fighting and whoring, and just whole-hog living in general. [...] See, unlike, I imagine yourself and lots of other people, I don't have church religion. Haven't been saved or bathed. No sir, no real holy dunk in the Tug to get my sins washed away. I don't do no dance of the spirit. [...] There's one holy thing inside me as thick as it was in Jesus. That's my idea of justice. I have that idea from right up top here... and on all the way down to here" (59-60). It is captured equally well in the Hazel Dickens song "Freedom's Disciple (Working-Class Heroes)" where she sings "Yes, you are freedom's disciple, my courage and my pride / It's you that I look to when I need faith by my side / It's you that I worship and not some idol pawn / It's your book of life I read for the strength to carry on." See Hazel Dickens and Bill C. Malone, *Working Girl Blues: The Life & Music of Hazel Dickens* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 83. For a revision of the understanding of saints that deemphasizes saintly perfection and stresses their vision of justice, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets: A Feminist Theological Reading of the Communion of Saints* (Ottawa: Novalis, 1998).

¹⁴⁸ See Peter Maurin, "What the Catholic Worker Believes" and "A New Society," in *Easy Essays*, Catholic Worker Reprint Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 76, 109.

¹⁴⁹ Wendell Berry, "Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front."

¹⁵⁰ LS, no. 197.

¹⁵¹ Exodus 3:5.

¹⁵² As "This Land is Home to Me" stated, "We have no easy answers, so this is but a first step. It must not be the last step. Hopefully, this letter, itself a product of dialogue, will start a process, wherein the Catholic community can join together with people of good will throughout the region to reflect on and act for a more just society" (32). Pope Francis expressed a similar view of openness in *Evangelii Gaudium*: "The Church's teachings concerning contingent situations are subject to new and further developments and can be open to discussion, yet we cannot help but be concrete – without presuming to enter into details – lest the great social principles remain mere generalities which challenge no one" (EG, no. 182).

¹⁵³ "This Land is Home to Me," 32.

¹⁵⁴ "This Land is Home to Me," 36.

¹⁵⁵ Al Fritsch, SJ, *Jesus Christ Activist: A Work-in-Progress* (London, KY: Brassica Books, 2015), available at <http://www.earthhealing.info>.

¹⁵⁶ The quote is from the film "Keeper of the Mountains."

¹⁵⁷ Bell, *Our Roots Run Deep as Ironweed*.

¹⁵⁸ Kirkland, "Mountain Memories."

¹⁵⁹ "This Land is Home to Me," 32.

¹⁶⁰ The term "sustenance economy" is used by ecofeminist scientist, philosopher, and activist Vandana Shiva. See *Earth*

Democracy: Justice, Sustainability, and Peace (Brooklyn, NY: South End Press, 2005).

¹⁶¹ "At Home in the Web of Life," 68.

¹⁶² "[T]he question that must be addressed is not how to care for the planet, but how to care for each of the planet's millions of human and natural neighborhoods, each of its millions of small pieces and parcels of land, each one of which is in some precious way different from all the others" (Wendell Berry, "Word and Flesh," in *What Are People For?* [Berkeley: Counterpoint Press, 1990], 200, cited in Myers, "From 'Creation Care' to 'Watershed Discipleship'").

¹⁶³ Numerous faith-based and secular groups have been active on the issue of mountaintop removal for years. Some examples are Appalachian Voices, Christians for the Mountains, Coal River Mountain Watch, Keeper of the Mountains, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Mountain Justice, Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (OVEC), Radical Action for Mountain People's Survival (RAMPS), Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM), Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, SouthWings, United Mountain Defense, West Virginia Highlands Conservancy. See also Shapiro, *Mountain Justice*. Community-based research of environmental and human health impacts of mining have been conducted by scientists like as Michael Hendryx and Ben Stout.

¹⁶⁴ Mary Hansen, "As State Pols Resist Obama's Climate Plan, West Virginians Build Renewables Anyway," *Yes! Magazine* (Oct. 30, 2015), available at <http://www.yesmagazine.org/planet/as-state-pols-resist-obama-s-climate-plan-west-virginians-renewables-20151030>.

¹⁶⁵ Of note here is the work of Jesuit Al Fritsch, much of which is accessible through the website <http://www.earthhealing.info> and through the website of an organization he founded, Appalachia – Science in the Public Interest, <http://www.appalachia-spi.org>. See also Al Fritsch and Paul Gallimore, *Healing Appalachia: Sustainable Living through Appropriate Technology* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 2007); Al Fritsch, "An Appropriate Technology Future" (no date), available at <http://www.earthhealing.info/ATFuture.pdf>.

¹⁶⁶ Eliot Coleman coined the term "deep organic." See his website at <http://www.fourseasonfarm.com>. See also Michelle Nijhuis, "Activists and Small-Scale Farmers Are Going 'Beyond Organic' to Push Local Foods," *Grist* (Nov. 12, 2003), available at <http://grist.org/article/beyond>.

¹⁶⁷ Michael Pollan, *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals* (New York: Penguin, 2006).

¹⁶⁸ See <http://asapconnections.org>, <http://growappalachia.org>, <http://www.growov.org>, and <http://aldersonfoodhub.org> for more information. See also Erin L. McCoy, "Mountain Grown: Appalachia's New Local Food Economy," *Yes! Magazine* (Aug. 21, 2013), available at <http://www.yesmagazine.org/new-economy/mountain-grown-appalachia-s-new-local-food-economy>.

¹⁶⁹ Jessica Lilly and Roxy Todd, "Farming Could Offer Jobs for Struggling Families in the Coalfields, But it Won't Be Easy," *Inside Appalachia* (Sept. 11, 2015), available at [\[wvpublic.org/post/farming-could-offer-jobs-struggling-families-coalfields-it-wont-be-easy\]\(http://wvpublic.org/post/farming-could-offer-jobs-struggling-families-coalfields-it-wont-be-easy\).](http://</p></div><div data-bbox=)

¹⁷⁰ See <http://www.stepbystepwv.org>, <http://www.highland-educationalproject.org>, and <http://whatsnextwv.org>.

¹⁷¹ See <http://www.maced.org> and <https://www.kftc.org/abf>.

¹⁷² See <http://highlandercenter.org>.

¹⁷³ See <http://asdevelop.org>.

¹⁷⁴ This kind of proposal was under discussion following a lecture on "The Modern Day Union" by Dan Kane, Secretary-Treasurer of the United Miner Workers of America (UMWA) at Wheeling Jesuit University on November 19, 2015. The Wheeling Academy of Law and Science Foundation (WALS Foundation) is among the proponents of this idea. See <http://www.walswheeling.com>.

¹⁷⁵ Al Fritsch and Kristin Johannsen, *Ecotourism in Appalachia: Marketing the Mountains* (Lexington, KY: The UP of Kentucky, 2004).

¹⁷⁶ For a sampling of these efforts, see the website of the Appalachian Transition Initiative at <http://www.renewappalachia.org>. The preservation of Appalachian "people's history" includes publications by authors like David Alan Corbin, William Blizzard, and Wess Harris; the music and storytelling of Carrie and Michael Kline (<http://www.folktalk.org>); and new institutions such as the Whipple Company Store and Appalachian Heritage Museum (<http://www.whipplecompanystore.com>) and the West Virginia Mine Wars Museum (<http://www.wvminewars.com>).

¹⁷⁷ For more on these issues, see the website of the organization Common Cause at <http://www.commoncause.org>.

¹⁷⁸ LS, no. 186. See also the Catholic Committee of Appalachia statement "Life's Foundation: A Statement on Protecting Water" (September 20, 2015), available at <http://www.ccappal.org/publications/statements-resolutions/protecting-water>.

¹⁷⁹ Swedish, *Living Beyond the "End of the World,"* 143. See also Pope Francis: "Just as goodness tends to spread, the toleration of evil, which is injustice, tends to expand its baneful influence and quietly to undermine any political and social system, no matter how solid it may appear. If every action has its consequences, an evil embedded in the structures of a society has a constant potential for disintegration and death. It is evil crystallized in unjust social structures, which cannot be the basis of hope for a better future" (EG, no. 59).

¹⁸⁰ Bolivia has enshrined the rights of Earth in law. See John Vidal, "Bolivia enshrines natural world's rights with equal status for Mother Earth," *The Guardian* (Apr. 10, 2011), available at <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2011/apr/10/bolivia-enshrines-natural-worlds-rights>.

¹⁸¹ Pope Francis, "Address of the Holy Father to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements."

¹⁸² <http://www.ccappal.org>, <http://www.christiansforthemountains.org>, <http://www.christianapp.org>, <http://thomas-mertoncenter.org>, <http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org>.

¹⁸³ The Catholic Committee of Appalachia has issued a number of statements since 1995, including statements on

racism, mountaintop removal, and the protection of water. For a complete list, see <http://www.ccappal.org/publications/statements-resolutions>. Grassroots faith-based groups issued an "Interfaith Statement on Mountaintop Removal" in 2007, available at <https://www.kftc.org/mountaintop-removal-tour-interfaith-leaders>.

¹⁸⁴ Church leaders and institutions have made statements on issues particular to the region. The Roman Catholic bishops of Kentucky and the West Virginia Council of Churches have issued statements on mountaintop removal, for example. See Catholic News Documentary Service, "Mountaintop Removal Protested," *Origins* 32, no. 30 (Jan. 9, 2003), 504; West Virginia Council of Churches, "Statement on Mountaintop Removal Mining," (2007, revised 2010), available at <http://www.wvcc.org/public-policy.html>. Bishop Michael Bransfield of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston has released a number of pastoral letters on issues facing his West Virginia diocese, including health, child poverty, mine safety, addiction, and the elderly. See <http://www.dwc.org/bishop-bransfield/pastoral-letters.html>. We make special note of the founding of the Clifford J. Lewis Appalachian Institute at Wheeling Jesuit University in 2002, largely through the efforts of the late Fr. Joseph Hacala, SJ, which was directly inspired by the message of the original Appalachian pastoral letters. See <http://www.wju.edu/ai>.

¹⁸⁵ See Bethlehem Farm in Clayton, WV at <http://www.bethlehemfarm.net>; Mt. Tabor Benedictines at <http://www.mtabor.com>; Elder Spirit Community in Abingdon, VA at <http://www.elderspirit.net>; Appalachian Catholic Worker in Spencer, WV at <http://www.acwfarm.com>; Alderson Hospitality House in Alderson, WV at <http://www.alderonhospitalityhouse.org>; House of Hagar in Wheeling, WV at <http://www.houseofhagarcw.com>; Riverside Community Catholic Worker at <https://www.facebook.com/RiversideCommunity-CatholicWorker>; and St. Francis - St. Joseph Catholic Worker House in Cincinnati, OH at <http://www.catholicworkercincinnati.org>.

¹⁸⁶ See St. Eugene's website at <http://www.steugene.org>.

¹⁸⁷ An excellent resource for parishes on welcoming sexual minorities is James A. Schexnayder, *Setting the Table: Preparing Catholic Parishes to Welcome Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People and Their Families* (self-published, 2011).

¹⁸⁸ For resources, see the Watershed Discipleship initiative at <http://watersheddiscipleship.org>.

¹⁸⁹ We agree with the assessment of theologian Joe Holland that Roman Catholic social teaching on unions has been inadequately emphasized over the last few decades. For Holland's analysis, see his *100 Years of Catholic Social Teaching Defending Workers and Their Unions: Summaries and Commentaries for Five Landmark Papal Encyclicals* (Washington, D.C.: Pacem in Terris Press, 2012).

¹⁹⁰ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).

¹⁹¹ Alana Semuels, "Imagining a Post-Coal Appalachia," *The Atlantic* (April 8, 2015), available at <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/04/imagining-a-post-coal-ap->

[palachia/389817](http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/04/imagining-a-post-coal-ap-).

¹⁹² "This Land is Home to Me," 36.

¹⁹³ LS, no. 19.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As the title indicates, this “People’s Pastoral” is a “work of the people” and would not have been possible without the involvement and support of so many people throughout the region. In particular, the Catholic Committee of Appalachia would like to thank:

The People’s Pastoral Committee:

Donna Becher
Marie Cirillo
Beth Davies, CND
Betsy Dwyer
Eric Fitts
Jaculyn Hanrahan, CND
Jeannie Kirkhope
Matthew Kosydar
Michael lafrate
Alyssa Pasternak Post
Rev. John Rausch
Eddie Sloane
Rev. Andrew Switzer
Carol Warren

We also thank members of the People’s Pastoral Committee who served during earlier periods of the People’s Pastoral process.

Catholic Committee of Appalachia Board of Directors (2015):

Donna Becher
Bruce Cahoon
Brian DeRouen (Chair of the Board)
Michael lafrate
Matthew Kosydar
Mary Dennis Lentsch, PBVM
Ann Quinn, OSF
Brother Joe Steen
Rob Weise
Jeannie Kirkhope (Coordinator)

We also thank past board members who served during earlier periods of the People’s Pastoral process.

Consultants:

Beth Davies, CND
Jaculyn Hanrahan, CND
Joe Holland
Rev. Les Schmidt

Playwright:

Catherine Bush

Lead author:

Michael lafrate

Editing team:

Adam Brown
Lou Volpe
Jessica Wroblewski

Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation*, copyright © 2007 Priests for Equality. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Paintings:

Christopher Santer
Front cover: “Apparition IV”
Back cover: “Apparition II”
Centerfold: “Ghost Mountain #4”
Section pages: “Apparition II,” “Ghost Mountain #4,” “Ghost Mountain #1,” “Apparition IV”
Part of the “Mountains” series (2015), available at www.christophersanter.com/mountains

Cover and text layout and design:

Liz Pavlovic, www.lizpavlovic.com

Photographs and other art (by page):

Tom Barnes (3, 44)
Jan Barthel (12)
Chuck Conner (10, 29, 36, 41, 54)
Brian DeRouen (51)
Carl Galie (13, 31 [mountains], 34 [coal town], 50)
Jeff Gentner (7)
Dave Harl (43)
Michael lafrate (18, 19)
IndustriALL Global Union (15)
Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (55)
Michael Key (24)
Jeannie Kirkhope (11, 56, 58)
Bill Maloney (34 [solar])

Kelly Meloun (39)
Angela Moulton (32)
Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition (26)
Eddie Sloane (8)
Waterkeepers Alliance (34)
Will Solis (21)
Vivian Stockman (31 [MTR])

Printed by:

Morgantown Printing & Binding
Morgantown, W.Va.

Thank you to all who contributed to this process at every stage, whether through brainstorming, facilitation and/or participation in listening sessions and interviews, or review of the initial drafts of the text.

Special thanks to the various organizations and individuals who have supported the process of the People's Pastoral as we gathered stories, either through their direct participation or by helping to promote our efforts in their publications, such as the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, the various Councils of Churches, Christians for the Mountains, Appalachian Voices, *The Catholic Virginian* of the Diocese of Richmond, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth, Barry Hudock, Glenmary Home Missioners, Federation of Communities in Service (FOCIS), Sharon Abercrombie of *National Catholic Reporter*, Dennis Sadowski of Catholic News Service, and Glynis Board of West Virginia Public Radio.

Very special thanks to the Catholic Committee of the South, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling, W.Va., William Hogan, Pat and Mary Ellen Cassidy, and Beth Collins of the Clifford J. Lewis Appalachian Institute at Wheeling Jesuit University who provided significant funding and other resources toward the People's Pastoral project.



When the Roman Catholic bishops of the world gathered at the Second Vatican Council, they described the Church as “the People of God”—not only the pope, bishops, and clergy, but the entire People of God. They further articulated in *Gaudium et Spes* how the Church was to be present in the modern world, and the key was dialogue.

Since 1970, members of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA) have been in dialogue with the people of Appalachia. We meet them where they are: in the hills and hollers; in small towns and big cities; in the coal mines, factories, schools; and on front porches. As we listen to their stories, we hear the cry of the poor, the excluded, the forgotten. It has become increasingly easier to hear Earth’s cry, too, and, indeed, that of the entire cosmos. In listening, we come to find our own stories resonate deeply with theirs, and we learn from them how profoundly empowering story-telling can be.

This pastoral letter gathers up that cry, those stories from “the least among us” in the context of all God’s creation, and recognizes the authority in them. It gives voice to the People of God rising throughout Appalachia and, through it, a universal echo can be heard inviting the church and the world to respond in action. May each of its readers be inspired to become a “living pastoral” and may the dialogue be forever ongoing.

**O RADIANT DAWN,
SPLENDOR OF ETERNAL LIGHT,
SUN OF JUSTICE:
COME,
SHINE ON THOSE WHO
DWELL IN DARKNESS
AND THE SHADOW OF DEATH.**

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia is a faith based network of people raising a prophetic voice for Appalachia and her people. Since 1970, CCA has existed to serve Appalachia, her poor and the entire web of creation. Mountaintop removal, labor, private prison development, sustainable lifestyles and communities, poverty, health, clean water, racism and climate change are among those issues which CCA has addressed. CCA has taken responsibility for the organization and ongoing promulgation of two groundbreaking pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, “This Land is Home to Me” (1975) and “At Home in the Web of Life” (1995).

