

St. Aidan's Episcopal Church
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Environmental Justice Mission Brief

St. Aidan's is committed to stewardship of the environment and addressing environmental justice issues. We do not claim authority or special expertise in these matters. We are still trying to hear God's voice in our mission. Yet, we feel called to increase and spread our passion for the stewardship of God's creation.

We want to call others into dialogue and ministry with St. Aidan's to act upon our environmental justice concerns. We are a community that fosters open dialogue and a place where all perspectives are listened to with respect.

Our series of handouts aim to provide information, resources and action ideas regarding current environmental justice issues.

Indigenous People's Rights and Climate Change

The following is based on a September 8, 2018 article from *Salon*,¹ written by Jade Begay and Ayse Gursoz entitled, *Rainforest Action Network: Why defending Indigenous rights is integral to fighting climate change*.

According to an EPA REPORT entitled *Disparities in Distribution of Particulate Matter Emission Sources by Race and Poverty Status*, dated 2-22-2018, non-whites bear a higher burden in terms of pollution that leads to related problematic health issues. For instance, on the reservation in Ponca, Oklahoma, fracking has contaminated the wells making the water too toxic to drink and coincides with increased cancer cases. Communities of poverty are the least responsible for causing climate change pollutants and are the most negatively impacted by them. Historically and now, climate change has been enabled through colonial practices. Fossil fuel extraction and production over the past 200 years has been built on "the dispossession of Indigenous lands and resources."

Climate change is drastically altering the landscape. For traditional cultures, this also alters customs, traditions, and ways of being that are intrinsic to Indigenous peoples' understanding of themselves as a people connected to the earth. Natural food sources are diminishing. Animal populations are

stressed and endangered. Plant, vegetation, and herbs that are part of traditional culture and medicine resources are also being impacted.

Begay and Gursoz write, "Climate change isn't just a scientific issue – it's an issue of racial inequality, economic inequality and cultural genocide." Indigenous communities globally are finding they can't swim or fish in their own waters, hunt traditional food or pick traditional medicines. Climate change is not just changing the ecosystems around them; it's harming their culture, self-determination, health, and economic wellness.

Indigenous communities steward lands and waters that make up 80% of the world's biodiversity. Still, even the "ground breaking" Paris Agreement doesn't address human rights or recognize Indigenous peoples' rights. Begay and Gursoz end their article with a call to stand with Indigenous peoples' political actions and resistance to ecologically harmful fossil fuel practices.

For further exploration:

1. Join St. Aidan's Episcopal Church, Ann Arbor, on Sunday October 14th at 10am for worship that aims to honor and give thanks for Native American people, community and heritage, and bring to our attention the social concerns and justice issues of Indigenous peoples in the U.S.
2. In the book *Spiritual Ecology*,² Chief Oren Lyons of the Onondaga Nation teaches from their prophesies that there will be a degradation of the earth and that there will be two warning systems for the degradation: 1. "When you see that the accelerations of the winds are growing, then you are in dangerous times." 2. How earth's societies are treating children is determinative of degradation. **Bible reflection:** Luke 21:25-26; "There will be signs . . . and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting with fear and with foreboding of what is coming on the world."

What kind of world do we want to live in?

Who is going to lead us into that world?

3. Please see our source for this brief, Jade Begay and Ayse Gursoz's 9-8-18 *Salon* article for a more detailed conversation. For mission and projects see also the Rainforest Action Network: <https://www.ran.org/>

¹ https://www.salon.com/2018/09/08/rainforest-action-network-why-defending-indigenous-rights-is-integral-to-fighting-climate-change_partner/

² *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn ed., Golden Sufi center, Point Reyes, California, 2013, pg33 eBook