



Franciscan Federation

of the Sisters and Brothers of the Third Order Regular
in the United States

Franciscan Federation JPIC Resolution for 2022-2023 Confronting Environmental Racism with a Franciscan Heart

Statement of Resolution

We, the members of the Franciscan Federation, renounce the egregious sin of environmental racism that exists in the United States and globally. We recognize the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color and are called to work for environmental justice.

Rationale

*Most of us heard of the water crisis in Flint, Michigan.
Over 54% of the population in Flint is Black.*

*"Cancer Alley", an 85-mile stretch of land along the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, is sometimes referred to as the "frontline of environmental racism."
The area is lined with oil refineries and petrochemical plants and residents from the area are 50 times more likely to develop cancer than the average American.
Those who live there are predominantly Black.*

"Asthma Alley", also known as South Bronx, New York, is 1.4% Caucasian, 57.4 % Hispanic, and 34.1% Black.

Environmental racism can exist in many forms, from citizens drinking contaminated groundwater, workplaces with unsafe health regulations, the existence of coal-fired power stations close to predominantly non-white communities, or children attending school in decaying buildings with asbestos problems. People of color are far more likely to live in areas with higher rates of air pollution, toxic waste facilities, landfills, and lead poisoning.

An African American civil rights leader, Benjamin Chavis, first used and defined the term “environmental racism”. Chavis defined environmental racism as “racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of color for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities, and the history of excluding people of color from leadership of the ecology movements”.

How are we, as Franciscans, to respond to environmental racism?

In *“FRATELLI TUTTI”*, Pope Francis reminds us: “Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world’s poorest.” 13

In *LAUDATO SI'*, Pope Francis argues that praising the God of creation includes being willing to challenge and transform systems, institutions, and our own patterns of comfort and consumption that fail to respect our duty to care for the planet and for each other. "Human life is itself a gift," he says, "which must be defended from various forms of debasement."

He goes on to recognize the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of color: "The deterioration of the environment and of society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet: "Both everyday experience and scientific research show that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest".⁴⁸

One particularly serious problem is the quality of water available to the poor. Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, including those caused by microorganisms and chemical substances. Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity.³⁰

CALL TO RESPOND / CALL TO ACTION

To respond with concrete intention, let our Call to Action be a collective Franciscan voice to respond as peacemakers as we confront Environmental Racism with a Franciscan Heart. We propose that all Franciscans and Franciscan Hearted People join the Franciscan Federation and the Franciscan Action Network to take at least one action to confront environmental racism.

For personal reflection, sharing and action steps:

- True environmental justice refers to redistributing decision-making power back to vulnerable communities that are systemically impacted by environmental racism.
- Do some research on the local and federal policies that are designed to perpetuate the disproportionate environmental hazards found in underprivileged communities.
- Donate to organizations advocating for environmental justice or lend your help as a volunteer.
- Increase awareness of the air quality in your area by clicking on <https://www.airnow.gov/>.
- Hold your Representatives accountable. Advocate for and follow the progress of legislation focused on the ***Environmental Justice Act*** which will right environmental wrongs that disproportionately harm communities of color, low-income and indigenous communities and the ***Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act***

What to Watch / What to Read:

- World Economic Forum: What is environmental racism and how can we fight it? Includes a short video explaining environmental racism <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/what-is-environmental-racism-pollution-covid-systemic/>
- **10 egregious examples of environmental racism in the United States** <https://www.insider.com/environmental-racism-examples-united-states-2020-8>
- Please click here to read The Atlantic's coverage of the EPA National Center for Environmental Assessment 2018 report that showed how people of color are more likely to experience exposure to pollutants. Please watch the accompanying 90 second video at the end of the article which labels, "Environmental Racism as the New Jim Crow."
- Youth Perspective on Environmental Justice and Racism TED talk

- Environmental racism, which is the disproportionate impact of environmental problems, like pollution, on communities of color, affects the Spokane Tribe firsthand.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qCZuuodQT8Q>
- Systemic Residential Race Discrimination in Spokane - A 6 Minute History - YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3T9_6icDhwQ
- <https://www.usccb.org/committees/ad-hoc-committee-against-racism>
- <https://lcwr.org/social-justice>