



**We are
Called**

TO HEAL. TO UNITE. TO JUSTICE.

Team Reflection - Huddle

No. 18 – Environment and Environmental Health Justice

The environment impacts the health of entire communities within geographical regions. It includes a broad range of issues such as air quality, temperature and climate change, food safety, mold, noise levels, radiation, natural disasters and more. Environmental conditions have greater adverse impact on communities with increased social needs and social inequities. Thus, environmental health must be a part of a holistic public and population health strategy.

In 2014 in Flint, Michigan, for a period of 18 months 100,000 residents were exposed to dangerous levels of lead in their drinking water. Similarly, the reliance of Native American communities on natural resources to maintain traditional diets, lifestyles, customs and languages, results in frequent contact with metal residuals from nearby uranium mine sites, creating exposures by inhalation, drinking water and ingestion of contaminated food sources. [18.1]

St. Francis' famous *Canticle of the Creatures* identifies his brothers and sisters as wind, water, fire, the sun and moon. Pope Francis observes how his namesake draws a deep connection between nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and one's own interior peace. [18.2] Further, Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment, or our "common home" as he calls it, squarely places Earth's environmental health within the Catholic social tradition.

All kinds of pollutants weaken a fragile environment and create health hazards. With the Earth as our common home, the question before us remains: how do we want our home to look as we pass it on to our children and grandchildren? Like the ripples created by a rock thrown into the pond, the sustained concern and care we give to the environment today impacts the health of those around us, including vulnerable communities and the generations to come.

Consider

What are the environmental hazards and threats in the communities served by my health care system or facility? How does this impact minority and vulnerable communities?

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Let us pray together,

All-powerful God,

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey toward your infinite light. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

- Excerpted from Pope Francis' "Prayer for our earth" in *Laudato Si*.

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[18.1] <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/supported/centers/ehd/grantees/unm/index.cfm>; See also: <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives/topic/social-determinants-health/interventions-resources/environmental>

[18.2] Pope Francis, *Laduauto Si*, para. 10.