

Environmental Justice and the Unitarian Universalists

What does *environmental justice* mean for Unitarian Universalists?

The environmental justice movement starts with human rights concerns. It addresses the most basic of human needs. Including the right to breathe, the right to an adequate supply of safe drinking water, the right to shelter, and the right to protection from toxic substances. These basic rights and needs are identified with human physiology and with the need for public health and safety.

Environmental justice advocates ask, "Who tries to control natural resources and for what purpose? Who speaks for justice?" These are ancient questions that have new significance in an age of advanced technology and global pollution.

The environmental justice movement "speaks truth to power and privilege."

The environmental justice movement has developed from the experience of African-Americans, Native Americans, low-income whites, and other people, who have often been oppressed, or simply ignored, as conversations about environmental problems and environmental protection have evolved.

Environmental Justice was the first major Unitarian Universalist statement to address the need for environmental justice. This 1994 General Resolution begins by noting: "We affirm justice and compassion in human relations, the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and respect for the interdependent web of all existence." The General Resolution also says, "The concept of environment justice links the principles of liberal religion with the values of ecological awareness and racial and class justice."

If you seek grounding.... An awareness of "the interdependent web of existence" may be the foundation for Unitarian Universalist thinking in the 21st century. Our seventh principle is popular and often mentioned. However: All of the Unitarian Universalist principles are connected and all of the principles matter. The moral solution for the climate change problem, and for other environmental problems, requires some emphasis on human rights and dignity. We want to live in the right relationships with all people and with all of the natural world.

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