

Coast to Coast

Healthy Waters Group educates for environmental justice



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From: Melanie A. Guste, RSCJ

Sent: Thursday, July 16, 2009 5:17:16 PM

Subject: A thought....and a question

Do you believe that it has been almost four years since Hurricane Katrina rocked the Gulf Coast? I am thinking about hosting a film screening and discussion of Jared Arsement's documentary, "***Paradise Faded: The Fight for Louisiana.***" It is about Louisiana's coastal wetlands, communities that are in jeopardy, and what must be done to help protect and restore the region.

If any of us wants to join in some follow-up advocacy, we can do it right then and there - write a brief letter, etc. I think that the whole issue is very relevant to our priorities ...

Eighteen Religious of the Sacred Heart responded to Sister Melanie Guste's email

invitation. About a month later, the Healthy Waters and Coastal Restoration Interest Group was formed. The group's goal is to live the priority on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation of the General Chapter of 2008:

Journeying with peoples of different contexts, races, and cultures, and listening profoundly to the joys and suffering of humanity have allowed us to be touched by the poverty, inequality, exclusion, violence, and environmental destruction that are present in today's world. We recognize with greater clarity the interconnectedness of global realities and the impact these have on our local situations. We are more aware of the marginalizing effects of globalization and of cultures of dominance and exclusion. (Chapter 2008)

Group members participate in advocacy networks, sign petitions, and share information, resources and prayer. The calamitous 2010 oil spill in the Gulf was galvanizing, demonstrating as it did the intimate interconnections between the natural environment and the economy. Sister Guste, a member of the provincial team and a consultant to non-profits in Louisiana, said, "This ecosystem affects the livelihood of many poor, vulnerable and indigenous persons in our country. In this one place, we can see the devastating effects of massive over-industrialization. A fragmented view of the world is destroying unprecedented amounts of our coastal wetlands, the barrier reefs, and native wildlife."

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Catholic social teaching recognizes that respect for all life, including the global biosphere, is a prerequisite for recognizing human dignity and developing a healthy economy. Blessed Pope John Paul II paved the way for the current environmental justice movement, which links respect for God’s creation with care for the most vulnerable members of our society.

“The human family is at a crossroads in its relationship to the natural environment,” Pope John Paul II said in 1993. “Not only is it necessary to increase efforts to educate in a keen awareness of solidarity and interdependence among the world’s people, it is also necessary to insist on the interdependence of the various ecosystems and on the importance of the balance of these systems for human survival and well-being. ... We must all learn to approach the environmental question with solid ethical convictions involving responsibility, self-control, justice and ... love.”

Members of the Society of the Sacred Heart believe that “to educate is in itself an act of justice,” (*Letter of the General Council*, June, 2006) so they educate themselves and others as citizens of God’s world and of creation. An important dimension to their activities is conscientious living, that is,



Eighteen RSCJ from the New Orleans and Grand Coteau/Baton Rouge areas at the inaugural meeting of the Healthy Waters and Coastal Restoration Interest Group.

making small daily choices in their lifestyle to reflect respect for creation. These activities go above and beyond recycling and turning off lights. For instance, at least one community uses a rain barrel for some of its water needs. They see it as a way to express awareness of and solidarity with the many people in the world who do not have access to clean water. Others are living more intentionally by daily composting, converting to alternative fuels, and using drying racks or clotheslines.

“As we live this call to the integrity of creation more deeply, it is leading us into the future in new ways of relationship with others,” Sister Guste said. “Our commitment is connecting us with others around the world.” An example occurred recently when the group united with Canadian RSCJ in resistance to the Oil/Tar Sands project in Alberta, Canada. (Not familiar with this issue? Visit <http://oilsandstruth.org>.) “I expect that these common bonds will continue to cause us to cross the boundaries of geography and to recognize the interconnectedness of global realities,” Sister Guste said.

The Healthy Waters and Coastal Restoration Interest Group now consists of thirty-two devoted members, literally from coast to coast – San Diego to Boston to Louisiana. This June 24-30, they will host *From Alligators to Zydeco* in New Orleans, to coincide with the event of the same name at the Academy of the Sacred Heart, New Orleans. Participants will listen to presentations, participate in coastal restoration work and pray together over the future of Louisiana wetlands. (For more information, contact Melanie Guste, RSCJ, at mguste@rscj.org or Diane Roche, RSCJ, at droche@rscj.org.)

The Healthy Waters and Coastal Restoration Group has a Facebook group open to anyone interested in learning more about living in harmony with the environment. Please visit the page and click the “ask to join” button. All members of the Sacred Heart family and friends are also invited to join the Healthy Waters Group and learn more about this critical issue. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact Sister Melanie Guste at 314-880-0547. ✦