



## Environmental Justice Tour Shows Past Problems Persist

Back on March 20 the Archdiocese's Creation Care Team sponsored an Environmental Justice tour. For the first day of spring, the day was more of a reprise of mid-winter, cold, blustery and dark. But the weather did set an appropriate mood for what our band of ten curious participants, drawn from area parishes and archdiocesan offices, were about to experience.

Climbing into the bus at 8:30 a.m. there was little to indicate we were entering a time machine that would take us back to the era of segregation, red lining and industrial indifference to the health of our planet and its people.

Led by one of Louisville's leading environmental activists, Tim Darst, Associate Director of Earth Literacy at Passionist Earth and Spirit Center, our group was quickly immersed in how the concept of environmental justice grew from a concern to a cause.

In the early 1980's it became evident to some social leaders that there was an overlap of interests between the civil rights movement and the environmental movement. That marriage of interest resulted in what today is called Environmental Justice. Its principles are straightforward: everyone, regardless of race, color, national origin, income, or where they live has the right to be treated fairly and with respect. This includes providing meaningful involvement of individuals in decisions impacting their immediate environment and ensuring there is protection from disproportionate environmental burdens. Most



*A typical site in Rubbertown*

importantly, Environmental Justice holds that a healthy environment is a human right.

As the tour began, Darst related that Louisville has always had its divides. From its early years the east side tended to be home to upper and middle class families, the west was mostly white working class and the south side was a diverse mix of white and immigrant working class. In the early 1900's as Black families became a larger part of Louisville's population the first trickles of white flight began to emerge. Some white families in the west side sought refuge from declining property values and recurring floods by moving to the Highlands. In the twenties and thirties government officials and bankers began color-coding areas of the city into blue, yellow, and red. Red-lining defined areas of low-wealth families where mortgages were difficult to obtain; this, coupled with deed restrictions in other areas of the city prohibiting owners from

selling their houses to minorities, served to concentrate races in designated areas. Keeping red-lined areas from increasing in value also prevented Black families from moving up the economic ladder. Basically there was no wealth to pass on to the next generation.

## Parks With Troubled Past

Some efforts to counter such separation were made. Starting in the 1890's Frederick Olmsted began designs that would lead to 17 parks across Louisville. His plans included linking three flagship parks from Louisville's three sectors by way of parkways. This included Cherokee in the east, Shawnee in the west and Iroquois in the south. However, by the 1920's it was evident that Louisville Black families did not feel welcome in the existing parks. The Board of Aldermen went to the Olmsted Brothers' firm and asked them to find an area and to design a park that Black families could call their own and feel comfortable in using. Development began on Chickasaw Park, and in 1923 the result was what's believed to be the only park designed by the Olmsted firm for a Black community during segregation.

As our bus rolled through still segregated west end neighborhoods several aspects of the area stood in stark contrast to neighborhoods we are used to seeing. The sparsity of substantial grocery stores, the proliferation of quickie marts, corner dollar stores and nearby expressways spoke volumes about living in an under-served area. A lack of access to fresh food, the distance residents have to travel to get to a good grocery, air laden with exhaust from tens of thousands of cars and trucks constantly passing overhead left little doubt as to the effect this has on the well-being of its residents.

Continuing west on Broadway we passed Shawnee park, just a stone's throw away from a vast parking lot of Marathon oil tanker trucks. Nearby a pocket park sits along the river with a raised soccer field right in its middle. Back in 1980's dioxin, a highly toxic, persistent organic pollutant, and known carcinogen was found in these grounds. The fish in a nearby lake were also found to be saturated with dioxin.

As our bus rolled closer to the Ohio river we found ourselves in the heart of Rubbertown, a legacy of World War II. In the midst of that war, America faced a crisis – a lack of rubber and other essential materials needed for the war effort. In 1942 the Office of War Production contracted National Carbide to construct a calcium carbide

and acetylene gas plant (now Carbide Industries). Soon contracts with other companies were negotiated including plants making chemical intermediaries. DuPont de Nemours & Co., was contracted to build a neoprene synthetic rubber facility (on the site that is now split between DuPont and Chemours). Three years later five tire companies joined up to



*Tim Darst explains the origins of Rubbertown to tour participants*

# Environmental Justice

*continued from page 2*

start on plants to make styrene-butadiene rubber for tires needed in the war.

This was the birth of Rubbertown. The West End location was considered perfect for all this construction. At the time this community included residential areas, small scale commercial zoning, schools, churches and the typical features of an area people call home. While the new plants quickly produced more than enough supplies needed for war resources, this once peaceful riverside community quickly turned into a hotspot of industrial production and growing air pollution.

## Rubbertown Turns Toxic

By the early 2000's, Rubbertown was named one of the most polluted neighborhoods in the United States. Over the years the community around Rubbertown had a reputation for incredibly high rates of volatile organic compounds. These dangerous pollutant particles affect many aspects of human life. A University of Louisville study in 2004 found the air quality in Rubbertown was the worst of all the neighborhoods in our city. The study found high levels of toxic chemicals, including benzene, butadiene, and 1,3-butadiene in the area. These chemicals and others being produced in the area, such as polyvinyl chloride (the same chemical the train that crashed in Palestine, Ohio carried) and ethylene, are known to cause cancer and respiratory problems, among other health issues.

In production, transfer and shipping chemical particles can become airborne and people in the area end up breathing it in. The problem is not just with the air. Rubbertown was also found to have contaminated water resources as a result of pollutants having been discharged into the Ohio River. Pollutants are also in the soil. Some chemical substances from the manufacturing process have lingered in the environment for extensive periods. As a result of toxic exposure people in the area have been found with elevated rates of cancer and other illnesses. Darst also informed us that with all the pollutants in the air,



*Chemical plants dominate the Rubbertown landscape*

this is not just a West End problem. It gets blown all over Louisville.

As we passed by a number of factories a common feature was the tall smokestacks billowing out clouds of white smoke. We passed by Dupont, Dow, Chemours, Valero and many others. There are a number of family residences just across narrow streets from many of these plants.

Maybe the most distressing neighborhood we saw is the ironically named Lake Dreamland. Once an oasis of neat summer cottages it is now the site of aged homes bound by a polluted lake on one side and a polluted river on the other. When the chemical companies moved in, Dreamland became a nightmare. After years of enduring the ravages of pollution, the city tried to entice residents to sell their houses and land to the city, but many residents decided to stick it out so they would have something to leave to their children.

If there is a Louisville monument to toxic chemicals it is the Lees Lane landfill. We pulled up to this 14-story high monster for a first-hand look. It sits right between the Ohio River and the edge of the Riverside Gardens neighborhood. This landfill is the largest of Louisville's two superfund sites. Superfund is the name given to the environmental program established to address abandoned hazardous waste sites. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is authorized to clean up such sites and to compel

# Environmental Justice

continued from page 3

the responsible parties to perform cleanups or reimburse the government for such clean-ups.

The need for the landfill had its origins around 1948 when the owners of a sand and gravel quarry got the idea to fill a big, gaping hole, they had created, with other people's trash and industrial waste — about 200,000 tons worth. In the 1970's, methane and other toxic landfill gases seeped into nearby homes in Riverside Gardens causing flash fires and groundwater laced with cancer-causing chromium. In addition, some 400 drums lay scattered around the banks of the river. In the 1980's when it was found that toxic waste was leaking into the river, the site was declared to be a superfund site and \$10 million was spent on cleaning it up. The cleanup was not entirely successful.

While the landfill covers some 112 acres, only four acres have a clay cap meant to prevent water from mixing with the waste and picking up hazardous chemicals. Lees Lane is also inside the city's 100-year floodplain and has been inundated at least twice, including 1997 and 1998. An EPA review in the late 1990's concluded that the garbage pile was leaching arsenic and lead into the river.

## Degradation Earns National Spotlight

A National Public Radio (NPR) report from 1997 found that "pollution coming from the



*Former Riverside Gardens residence*

landfill is nothing new for the community of Riverside Gardens. Originally built as a resort community to escape urban Louisville in the first half of the 20th century, the neighborhood has become a hotbed of environmental degradation. Besides the landfill, neighbors battled coal ash from the Cane Run power plant (before it converted to natural gas) and cancer-causing volatile organic compounds wafting over from Rubbertown.

"Over the last few years, the Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection has collected soil and air samples around the site. Regulators have determined neighbors in Riverside Gardens are safe from the landfill's contamination so long as they don't walk onto the site, said Energy and Environment Cabinet spokesman John Mura."

A groundwater test in 2012 found levels of the cancer-causing chemical arsenic above federal limits for drinking water. Some levels

were found to be 38 times higher than federal limits. The NPR report noted that "Now, state and federal officials say the site currently protects both human health and the environment, including groundwater."



*Portion of Lees Lane landfill with clay cap*

continued on page 5



*Cemetery at base of Lees Landfill*

However, the review does note the site needs 'groundwater and land use controls' to protect human health in the long-term."

Being the last stop on our tour, it was eerily appropriate that at the base of Lees Lane landfill lies a cemetery for the indigent. And while the tour provided a first-hand look at the true cost of our modern society, we also witnessed the greater cost burden borne by our neighbors in the West End.

Pope Francis' words from *Laudato Si'* succinctly characterize how the devastation of the West End has come about and why its costs epitomize an unjust situation. "In a word, businesses profit by calculating and paying only a fraction of the costs involved. Yet only when the 'the economic and social costs of using up shared environmental resources are recognized with transparency and fully borne by those who incur them, not by other peoples or future generations,' can those actions be considered ethical."

*(Mark Reilly was a tour participant and filed this report.)*

## Grill, Baby Grill... With Electricity

It's grilling season! Before you crank up your grill, did you know that propane produces almost 13 pounds of pollution per gallon burned? Worse, charcoal produces almost three times that much — as well as potential carcinogens. Time to consider electric? An electric grill has none of that baggage and comes with a wide range of benefits:

- **Cost savings:** Unlike other grill types, you don't have to refill your fuel source. And it eliminates refilling inconvenience.
- **Flexibility:** You can use them in tighter or covered places where open flames would be a hazard.
- **Easy to use:** Many of these grills will plug into a standard 120V outlet.

Of course, buying a new grill just for the sake of it is probably more trouble than it's worth. But if your old grill is on its last wheels going electric presents an option that's affordable, with a big serving of tasty benefits.



# Spring Has Sprung (*hoe, hoe, hoe*)

## It all started with leaves

While researching how and where to correctly apply home grown compost to my garden, I learned several ways to get a more decomposed result. My compost area is about 12' by 4' by 1'. Most articles and videos suggested the ideal compost bin be 3' by 3' by 3'. I consulted fellow parishioner and master gardener, Eileen Schweinhart; she said the suggested depth of 3' probably helps hold heat generated by bacteria better than my 1' depth. She recommended stacking my current pile to 3' so the heat generated coupled with warmer weather could finish the compost by early summer.

Yes, I was thrilled with the chore of hauling all that heavy half-broken down vegetation into one or more new piles 3' by 3' by 3'!

## 'Leave' It To Me

Another aspect of the ideal autumn compost bin is a 5 to 1 ratio of browns/carbons/leaves to greens/nitrogen/grass clippings. Leaves are mostly carbon and by themselves don't contain enough nitrogen to cause the bacteria to excel and compost. With seven mature trees in my yard, I have plenty of leaves, which I ground with the electric mower before hauling to the far corner of my back yard last fall. I added greens such as grass clippings, plant trimmings, plus coffee grounds, non-plastic tea bags, egg shells, and vegetable waste to my compost "mound".

Other key factors for a good compost pile are water and air. The bacteria in compost live on the film of the water and need to be wet but not soggy. The bacteria also need oxygen so compost should not be matted down. I parked my pitch fork beside the compost pile this winter and made some cursory attempts to aerate it.



## Vermiculture?

I toyed with the idea of adding red worms to my compost. On discussing this with Eileen she indicated vermiculture is mostly done by those with limited outdoor space or by those raising worms commercially. Red worms need specific housing structures, they like the dark, and prefer temperatures in the 55-77 degree range. Good locations for worm bins are basements or garages. Red worms also have some dietary quirks: they can't handle more than about 1/5 citrus peels to total waste fed to them. Outer layers of onions and some stems are best avoided also. Their care was more work than I was willing to exert.

## Using that "black gold"

Even with my less than perfect management, I have some dark crumbly compost that I am eager to use this spring. Compost is super high in the bacteria that annuals and green plants love. I learned the following from Joe Gardener's video, *How to add compost in the garden*.

*continued on page 7*

If starting a brand new garden bed with new plants, Joe recommends incorporating about 3-4 inches of compost into the top 12 inches of soil. If you have a limited supply of compost and are starting a new garden bed, he suggests just using the compost in the planting hole. Before adding the new plant to the planting hole, make sure the compost is not deep into the soil where plant roots can't reach it.

For existing beds or plants, Joe recommends gardeners apply about ½ to 1 inch of compost as a top dressing. Apply compost just out from the base of a plant to the plant's drip line. Top dressing is a process of adding compost only to the soil surface and not working it in. The reason for top dressing versus working compost into the soil, is to avoid disturbing the existing roots or soil network already in place below the soil surface. With top dressing (instead of digging) organisms already living in the soil will incorporate the compost into the soil.

After adding compost, he recommends topping it with a layer of natural mulch, like shredded leaves or straw. Composting every year, Joe assures, will improve your soil and your garden results.

## Just FYI

- Pound for pound leaves have more minerals than manure.
- The Berkeley Method of composting uses a ratio of 50% carbon to 50% nitrogen and can produce finished compost in about 18 days.
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*(This report was filed by Jeanna Danhauer, our avid gardener.)*

# Planting Wisely



Plants can be finicky little things. In order to thrive, they often need the right amount of light and water, specific soil conditions, and, like Goldilocks' porridge, they can't be too hot or cold. For those reasons, the best plants to add to your garden are ones that grow naturally in your area.

The USDA [Plant Hardiness Zone map](#) is an excellent free source to help you find perennial plants that are most likely to thrive where you live. The map shows the average lowest temperature in a given area over a 30-year span. This can give you an idea of which plants will survive the winter.

Here are three more things to keep in mind when shopping for new plants:

- Size: This may seem obvious, but make sure the plant fits the space. Will it quickly outgrow the area you have?
- Quality: Check leaves and roots for overall health. Check for signs of pests or disease. Excessing roots growing out of drainage holes or around the container is not a good sign.
- Sunshine: How much sun does the area where you plan to plant to get? Buy plants that do well with the amount of sun that area gets.

Most importantly, avoid invasive species. Always aim for adding native plants to your garden. Not only are they acclimated to our local ecosystem, they usually require less water and fertilizer, and that can save you money.

The Creation Care Team would love your feedback on this issue of *Common Home*. In addition, let us know if there is particular climate change topic that you've experienced, have seen in the news or read about in Laudato Si' that you'd like to see covered. Email us at: [commonhome914@gmail.com](mailto:commonhome914@gmail.com).



# The Lighter Side of Climate



Q. What would make lightning better than solar power?  
A. If, like solar power, it came free of charge!



Q. What do wind turbines think of energy efficiency?  
A. They're pretty big fans.



Q. A dangerous surge of electricity walks into a bar.  
A. The bartender says ... "Why the long phase?"



Q. What does the pirate hope to find in insulation?  
A. Rrrrr-value.

## Plan For Shelter Before Dangerous Weather

Adverse weather conditions—such as thunderstorms, heavy rain, snowstorms, hurricanes, and extreme heat—can pose serious threats to safety and well-being. In such situations, seeking timely and appropriate shelter is essential to protect oneself from harm and ensure survival. Sheltering is not merely about finding cover; it's about being prepared, aware, and proactive in response to changing environmental conditions.

When faced with severe weather, having a plan in place can be the difference between surviving and dying. Know the basics, for example, during a thunderstorm or tornado, the safest shelter is typically a sturdy building or a designated storm shelter, away from windows and exterior walls. In winter storms, it is crucial to remain indoors, retain heat, and avoid travel unless absolutely necessary. Likewise, during heatwaves, staying in cool, air-conditioned spaces helps prevent heat exhaustion or heatstroke.

In addition to physical shelter, access to emergency supplies—such as water, food, flashlights, and communication devices—can enhance safety during extended periods of adverse weather. Listening to weather updates and following the guidance of local authorities can also guide individuals to the safest available options. Ultimately, taking shelter is an act of awareness and responsibility. It demonstrates respect for nature's power and a commitment to safeguarding oneself and others. Preparation, calm decision-making, and quick action are the cornerstones of staying safe when weather conditions turn dangerous.



*(This report was filed by Brayton Bowen.)*

# Bug Poison, Not Good for Bugs, Birds or You

*"If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago. If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos."*

E. O. Wilson, American biologist, naturalist, ecologist and entomologist, 1929-2021.

It's Spring again! Time to plant, mow, weed, and enjoy your lawn. But what about the BUGS?

Perhaps you've lived long enough to recall bees swarming every flowering tree or vigorously scrubbing your car's front bumper and headlights to remove the many splattered insects' bodies. So how do you feel about insects?

Is your toddler or grandchild enthralled by the activity of ants and worms? Do bees visiting early spring flowers bring a smile to your face? Ever delighted in the flying jewel colors of butterflies, dragonflies, and birds? Or perhaps you have recoiled at the sight of a spider or fly. Maybe you are concerned about fleas, ticks, or mosquito borne diseases. Can these ideas of delight and disgust coexist?

In late spring last year, a young man was canvassing our neighborhood to sell a lawn treatment meant to eliminate "bugs" from our lawn. My husband politely told him we did not use those products. A week later I answered the door to find a young woman following up on his "no." The insecticide product was made from "natural" sources, she explained. She was referring to Pyrethrins, derived from a type of chrysanthemum, but highly toxic to bees, fish, and aquatic creatures.\* She also received a firm no from me.

Then the original young man returned again, willing to negotiate a lower price. My husband told him quite firmly not to come by again, as those insects had a right to be here.



What would you do?

According to the National Wildlife Federation 80 million pounds of insecticides are used on lawns across North America! This has a devastating effect across the entire ecosystem.

Pollinators, especially bees, are especially vulnerable to the effects of lawn chemicals. Most insecticides are broad-spectrum, that is, they don't target a specific type of insect and instead effect any insect it comes in contact with. Neonicotinoids and pyrethroids can disrupt bee learning and navigation and weaken their immune systems, causing death and reducing populations.

Insecticides, along with herbicides and rodenticides, can have harmful effects on our pets and children if ingested or simply picked up on the feet as they walk on the lawn.

Ninety six percent of terrestrial birds require insects, especially caterpillars, to feed their young. Insecticides and herbicides can drastically reduce the amount of food available to birds in spring, resulting in fewer birds.

*(This report was filed by Joan Shanahan, our bug enthusiast)*

\*Source: National Pesticide Information Center [npic@oregonstate.edu](mailto:npic@oregonstate.edu)

Run off from rainstorms can carry chemicals into the watershed, killing minnows and dragonfly nymphs and other aquatic creatures.

Should you find that your situation requires insect control, consider Integrated Pest Management which combines several natural approaches to controlling pests with minimal environmental impact. Encourage birds and bats to come to your property by installing bird houses and bat boxes. Plant native trees, shrubs, and flower species that host beneficial insects that feed on less desirable bugs. Hand pick pests and dispose of in soapy water. Finally, read product labels, become informed and choose your poison wisely. Beyond Pesticides ([beyondpesticides.org](http://beyondpesticides.org)) provides a list of least toxic insecticides, fertilizers and herbicides that are compatible with a more organic approach.

| Pesticide Type | Common Brands                               | Active Ingredients                        | Classifications                                                            | Non-Targeted Organisms and Systems Affected                                      |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Insecticide    | Spectracide Triazicide Insect Killer        | Gamma-cyhalothrin                         | Pyrethroid                                                                 | Highly toxic to mammals, bees, and aquatic organisms. Moderately toxic to birds. |
| Insecticide    | Bonide Insect & Grub Control Granules       | Imidacloprid, Lambda-cyhalothrin          | Neonicotinoid, Pyrethroid                                                  | Birds, aquatic organisms, bees, and fish.                                        |
| Insecticide    | BioAdvanced Complete Insect Killer          | Imidacloprid, Beta-cyfluthrin             | Neonicotinoid, Pyrethroid                                                  | Birds, aquatic organisms, bees, and fish.                                        |
| Insecticide    | Ortho Bug B Gon                             | Bifenthrin                                | Pyrethroid                                                                 | Fish, aquatic organisms, birds, and mammals                                      |
| Herbicide      | Roundup                                     | Glyphosate, POEA surfactant               | Glyphosate                                                                 | Aquatic organisms and bees.                                                      |
| Herbicide      | Roundup for Lawns (Northern version)        | MCPA, Dicamba, Sulfentrazone, Quinclorac  | Benzoic Acid, Aryl Trianone, Acetolactate Synthase Inhibitor               | Birds, aquatic organisms, bees, and mammals. Leaches into groundwater.           |
| Herbicide      | Roundup for Lawns (Southern version)        | Sulfentrazone, Dicamba, 2,4-D, Penoxsulam | Benzoic Acid, Aryl Trianone, Phenoxy Acid, Acetolactate Synthase Inhibitor | Birds, aquatic organisms, bees, and mammals. Slightly toxic to crustaceans       |
| Herbicide      | Ortho Weed B Gon                            | Dicamba, 2,4-D                            | Benzoic Acid, Phenoxy Acid                                                 | Birds, aquatic organisms, bees, and mammals. Leaches into groundwater            |
| Herbicide      | Bayer Advanced Weed Killer for Lawns        | MCPA, Dicamba                             | Phenoxy Acid, Benzoic Acid                                                 | Birds, aquatic organisms, bees, and mammals. Leaches into groundwater            |
| Herbicide      | Bonide Weed Beater Plus                     | Dicamba, 2,4-D                            | Benzoic Acid, Phenoxy Acid                                                 | Birds, aquatic organisms, bees, and mammals. Leaches into groundwater            |
| Fungicide      | BioAdvanced Fungus Control                  | Propiconazole                             | Triazole                                                                   | Fish. Has synergistic effects with neonicotinoids harming bees                   |
| Fungicide      | Spectracide Immunox Multi-purpose Fungicide | Myclobutanil                              | Triazole                                                                   | Toxic to aquatic organisms. Leaches into groundwater                             |

Source: *Dangers of Lawn Chemicals: Impacts and Alternatives* National Wildlife Blog August 30, 2024