

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



Environmental Justice is one of the priority issues of the Office of Justice and Peace/Respect Life. In its "[Environmental Justice Public Policy Framework](#)" the U.S. Catholic Bishops define Environmental Justice as "the search for a just solution to the disproportionate burdens of environmental degradation borne by the poor and people of color."

A just solution requires balancing the right to private property and a just use of property within a common good ethic. It requires protecting the public, workers, and especially vulnerable populations (i.e. the elderly, children -- born and unborn, workers in chemical intensive industries, the ill, etc.) from environmental harm. Finally, a just solution requires promoting economic development which eradicates global poverty while preserving the ecological heritage of the earth (sustainable development).

In our own Archdiocese we have many examples of organizations pursuing environmental justice. [OPAL](#) is mentioned above as a CCHD grant recipient. Here are three more examples.

The [Metropolitan Alliance for Common Good](#) (MACG) has been chosen to conduct a neighborhood-based home improvement program, providing energy efficiency upgrades for 100 homes in Portland's Cully neighborhood. The MACG-Cully project is part of Clean Energy Works Portland (CEWP).

The MACG-Cully project has three goals: reducing homeowner energy use and increasing home value; creating living-wage jobs; and mitigating climate change by cutting fossil-fuel use.

MACG, which began in the mid '80's as an eastside faith-based organization called Portland Organizing Project, chose Cully because the neighborhood includes many homes eligible for the upgrades and enough homeowners who could benefit. Cully has a high percentage of homeowners who are above the income guidelines for county weatherization assistance, but who may not be able to afford direct individual financing - the "middle bracket" that often gets missed in these types of programs.

The key MACG institution in Cully is [St. Charles Catholic Church](#). The Cully project, and environmental justice, is currently the priority of St. Charles's Peace and Justice Ministry.

MACG staff and leaders will mobilize volunteers-people of color and women, minority- and women-owned contractors, highly-rated non-profits, and social enterprises-to support the work of contractors and subcontractors who will perform the work, and report the results for program evaluation.

More than a dozen MACG institutions, a broad coalition including the Cully Association of Neighbors (CAN) and Verde Inc., are responsible for the Cully CEWP.

[Verde](#) is a non-profit social enterprise located in the Cully neighborhood. Verde's mission is to improve the economic health of disadvantaged communities by creating environmental job training, employment, and entrepreneurial opportunities, fostering the connection between economic vitality and environmental protection and restoration.

[Verde Energy](#), which received a Local Fall 2009 CCHD Grant, is a program of Verde. It hires, trains and employs low-income Latinos and Native Americans to provide residential and commercial weatherization services.



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Verde has another program, [Verde Outreach](#), to address the divide between sustainability and low-income communities:

Sustainability advocates know their industries. Sustainability advocates, however, know very little about proven models to connect low-income people and minority businesses to economic opportunity.

Low-income advocates know how to serve their communities: what policies and public contracting models improve minority business participation and workforce diversity in public works projects, but low-income advocates have not been a part of sustainability and remain excluded from green jobs.

Verde Outreach bridges this Green Divide.

Building a bridge within communities while pursuing environmental justice is a goal of [Our United Villages](#) of North/Northeast Portland, which inspires people to value and discover existing resources to strengthen the social and environmental vitality of communities.

One of Our United Villages' projects, [The ReBuilding Center](#), focuses on the environmental vitality of communities. The ReBuilding Center contributes to a healthier environment by diverting the region's largest volume of reusable building and remodeling materials from landfills (approximately eight tons per day), providing resources for the benefit of communities with the goal of promoting sustainable practices. It serves as an anchor for North Portland, contributing to the community's economic and social vitality; about 90 percent of Our United Villages' full-time staff members live in North/Northeast Portland.

The ReBuilding Center offers [DeConstruction Services](#), an affordable and sustainable alternative to conventional demolition. Working by hand, skilled crews salvage for reuse up to 85% of a building's major components. Deconstruction reduces waste, promotes reuse and recycling and minimizes the impact on our region's natural resources. It creates six to eight local jobs for every one created by standard demolition.

The social vitality of communities is the project of Our United Villages' [Community Outreach](#), which envisions neighborhoods that recognize and build on the strengths, talents, and resources of each individual to create a healthier, more vibrant community.

Community Outreach hosts events where people come together, discover their common interests, and develop ideas that benefit the community. It is a springboard for individuals and groups to turn their ideas into action.

These are just three examples of environmental justice partnering with community organizing in the North/Northeast section of Portland of the Archdiocese of Portland. But just solutions to the disproportionate burdens of environmental degradation borne by the poor and people of color must happen in places other than Northeast Portland, other than Coastal Oregon, other than the Eastern Seaboard; environmental justice must serve locations locally, nationally and globally, to [India](#), for example.