

**ABUNDANT LIFE
FOR ALL**
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Just Energy and Abundant Life

By Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee and Jacqueline Patterson

United Methodist Women Just Energy 4 All and NAACP Environment and Climate Justice Program Partnership Dialogue

What Does Energy Justice Look Like?

Jacqui: For Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) communities in the United States and in the Global South, energy injustice takes many forms, with a common thread of an extractive and exploitive economy. Poverty and race meet when people lack access to energy.

- Young Adrian lives near a coal-fired power plant in Indiantown, Florida. He has severe asthma and is often unable to go to school on poor air quality days. His health, educational outcomes and family economics are all impacted by his vulnerability and exposure to coal plant pollution.¹
- A grandmother in Newark, New Jersey, had a hard time paying her electric bill and the electricity was shut off, cutting off the oxygen from her respirator during a heatwave. Her son paid the \$500 she owed two days before her electricity was shut off. However, the system didn't register the payment in time. She died because of a few missed payments. The CEO of her energy supplier makes \$9 million in annual compensation.²

Energy, People and Problems

Jacqui: Though BIPOC communities use less energy, they are most impacted by climate change because institutional racism renders them more vulnerable and underrepresented in governance systems and other decision-making capacities.

Monied interests, including the fossil fuel industry, actively push back on clean air and clean energy policies as well as energy affordability policies including energy efficiency measures.

Elizabeth: When we turn on the lights, drive to church or hear of someone we love suffering from an asthma attack, we probably are not thinking about how that relates to our current energy system. The reality is that we are complicit in abetting an unjust energy system and being harmed by the energy we use. From extraction to processing, delivery and use, the energy we use is harming God's creation and communities around the world and at home, especially those most marginalized.

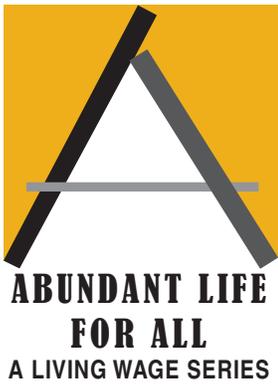
- The most significant threat to children's health and future is said to be fossil-fuel combustion by-products.³ U.S. children on diesel school buses (over 20 million) are exposed to 5 to 15 times more air toxins than the rest of the population.⁴

1. Personal Conversation, Jacqueline Patterson, September 2012, Orlando, Florida

2. [cnn.com/2018/07/09/health/new-jersey-woman-dies-oxygen-trnd/index.html](https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/09/health/new-jersey-woman-dies-oxygen-trnd/index.html) Accessed 11/11/2020

3. [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5800116/pdf/ijerph-15-00016.pdf](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5800116/pdf/ijerph-15-00016.pdf) Accessed 11/12/2020

4. Wargo, John, Ph.D., "Children's Exposure to Diesel Exhaust on School Buses." 2002. Environment & Human Health, Inc., ehhi.org/reports/diesel/diesel.pdf Accessed 11/12/2020



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Over two hundred million people in the United States were at risk of utility shutoffs.”



- A report found that in the Northeast and the Mid-Atlantic, residents of BIPOC communities breathe 66 percent more air pollution from vehicles than residents of white communities. The concentration of exposure is 76% higher for Latino residents, 73% higher for Asian American residents, and 61% higher for African American residents as compared to white residents.⁵

COVID-19 and Energy Justice

Jacqui: In the words of Mayor Stephen Benjamin of Columbia, South Carolina, “COVID-19 is like an x-ray exposing the broken bones of America’s systems.”⁶ In the case of energy, we need reconstructive surgery - a new system that upholds the human right to this life and death resource over corporate profit and wealth accumulation.

For BIPOC communities, historic exposure to pollution from energy production and other sources has resulted in pre-existing conditions, including respiratory illnesses, making them more vulnerable to severe and deadly effects of COVID-19. The extreme racial disparity in COVID-19 deaths is being attributed, in part, to the extensive incidence of these pre-existing conditions.

Communities are now facing extreme economic pain due to the pandemic. A growing number of households are seeing their electricity and heat shut off for non-payments. Even where shut-off moratoriums are in place, households face a build-up of insurmountable debt and damaged credit reports, deepening their economic insecurity.

Elizabeth: COVID-19 reminds us that ending environmental racism includes access to affordable energy. The United Methodist Church Energy Policy⁷ states, “Energy policies must guarantee universal service to all consumers, protecting low-income and rural residents.” There is no federal legislation to stop utility shutoffs and as of October 2020, 33 states did not have any protection for people unable to pay. Over two hundred million people in the United States were at risk of utility shutoffs.⁸

What Is Just Energy?

Elizabeth: Scripture calls us to participate in advancing justice not merely on an individual but a systemic level, connecting racial, economic and climate justice.

In our vision of a just energy system:

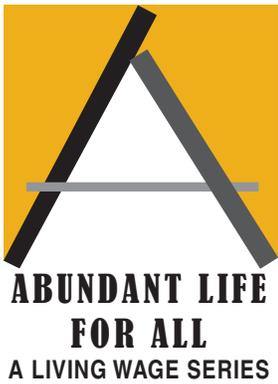
- No one is denied access to energy because they cannot afford it.
- The energy we use does not contribute to climate change, harm others or the environment.
- Energy is available to all and the benefits are equitably shared by all.
- Energy alternatives are both clean and renewable.
- Women and BIPOC communities, in addition to current energy-industry workers, have access to well-paying jobs in the new energy economy.

5. ucsusa.org/resources/inequitable-exposure-air-pollution-vehicles Accessed 11/12/2020

6. American Institute of Architects Annual Meeting, Keynote Panel: Architecture in Turbulent Times—Equity, Environment, Health, and Economy, Remarks by Columbia, SC, Mayor Stephen Benjamin, August 12, 2020

7. umc.org/content/book-of-resolutions-energy-policy-statement Accessed 11/12/2020

8. neada.org/utilityshutoffsuspensions/ Accessed 11/12/2020



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**God has provided
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A just energy system will not be achieved merely by replacing fossil fuel energy such as coal, oil or gas with nuclear or biomass energy, which also harm workers, communities and the environment.

Jacqui: Energy justice means:

- Energy Without Injustice. Power Without Pollution.⁹
- Decentralization of ownership and control of the energy sector.
- Shifting away from a system with a core purpose of generating profits for a wealthy few.
- Moving away from a system of extraction and exploitation.
- A just transition to an energy sector built on the principles of regeneration, democracy and a cooperative, caring economy.

Energy Justice and Abundant Life

Jacqui: The world was divinely designed as one of abundance. Our vision is rooted in recognition that there is enough for everyone. Our natural world enables us to enjoy the abundance of energy generated by sun and wind in a way that is regenerative.

Enough for all opens up a conversation about the idea that cultural, economic and natural resources should be accessible to all members of society and held in common. We do have abundance, and we can structure society so that no one pays the price of poverty with their life.

Elizabeth: God has provided us with an economy of abundance to meet our needs. Abundance must be understood in the context of living out right and just relationships with God’s creation and one another, not “abundance” for a few at the cost of the rest.

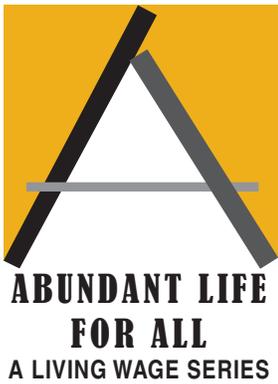
Envisioning Pathways to Energy Justice

Jacqui: Making this transition will require:

- Visioning: Start with community perspectives and inclusive processes.
- Strategic Communications: Open up our imaginations and ensure that the public sees the possibilities of doing things differently.
- Organizing and Power Building: People must build power to exact change.
- Democracy: Democratic systems of decision-making, including by reversing corporate influence in elections through campaign finance reform and participatory budgeting.
- Policy Change: Pass legislation that regulates pollution while paving a path for the new energy economies.
- Economic Development: Shift from investor-owned utilities to public sector utilities.

Elizabeth: An action by an individual alone will not change our system. Our current infrastructure, laws and regulations make it nearly impossible to extract ourselves from this unjust energy system even as we are being harmed by it. Change must be systemic. We can add our voices to bring that change about.

⁹ Slogan from Our Power Campaign
movementgeneration.org/the-our-power-campaign-is-here Accessed 11/9/2020



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**This is not a
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[this is] a biblical
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Only a clear vision of what just energy entails, collective pressure and participation, and concrete policy measures at the local, state and national level will change our energy system. As consumers, we need to demand clean and renewable energy, along with equipment, appliances and vehicles that are fueled by just energy and the infrastructures that support them.

This is not a political issue. Whatever our political affiliation, we have a biblical call to be both stewards of God’s creation and to pursue the health and well-being of all people.

What United Methodist Women Members Can Do:

- Make Just Energy for All¹⁰ a social action priority for your UMW unit this quadrennium. It is a way to integrate economic, racial and climate justice.
- Get grounded – join UMW webinars and monthly Just Energy for All calls to explore how you can advance just energy in your communities.
- Connect with leaders and partners in your community – partner with NAACP’s Environmental and Climate Justice Program,¹¹ Interfaith Power & Light¹² or frontline organizations working to advance energy justice and 100% renewable energy focused on justice and equity.
- Use the NAACP Just Energy Policies and Practices Action Toolkit as a resource for local action. naacp.org/climate-justice-resources/just-energy/.

About the Authors:

Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee is Executive for Economic and Environmental Justice with United Methodist Women. She previously served with the General Board of Global Ministries and the World Council of Churches UN Liaison Office.

Jacqueline Patterson is the Senior Director of the NAACP Environmental and Climate Justice Program and serves as coordinator of Women of Color United. She currently serves on the Steering Committee for Interfaith Moral Action on Climate and on the Advisory Board for Center for Earth Ethics.

10. unitedmethodistwomen.org/climate-justice Accessed 11/12/20

11. naacp.org/issues/environmental-justice/ Accessed 11/12/20

12. interfaithpowerandlight.org/about/ Accessed 11/12/20

Abundant Life for All is a series addressing aspects of the United Methodist Women Living Wage for All Campaign for use by members in programs for education and action. Edited by elmira Nazombe.



unitedmethodistwomen.org/living-wages