

CATHOLIC COMMITTEE OF APPALACHIA

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Catholic Committee of Appalachia Issues Statement to Region's Bishops Asking for Strong Response to Pope's Ecological Encyclical

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Spencer, WV, Tuesday, July 22, 2015 – A grassroots Catholic social justice organization has issued a statement to the bishops of the Appalachian region asking them to speak strongly on environmental justice matters in response to Pope Francis' recent ecological encyclical. The Catholic Committee of Appalachia, currently based in Spencer, West Virginia, made the statement available to media this week.

The statement was initially conceived in response to the public comments of West Virginia Bishop Michael Bransfield regarding the encyclical, titled *Laudato Si'*, which the organization found concerning. In a diocesan statement and numerous media interviews Bransfield expressed his views on how the document would apply in his diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, which includes all of West Virginia. The bishop's comments appeared to downplay the Pope's strong message of economic change and the need to shift rapidly to alternative energy sources, changes which Bransfield claimed are "not financially feasible in West Virginia."

The organization calls on the 26 bishops of the region to speak and act in the bold spirit of Pope Francis' encyclical. Namely, statement asks the bishops to emphasize four points: 1) to take Francis' view of "integral ecology" which sees economic and ecological matters as related to one another; 2) to expose and seek to rectify the root causes of the region's poverty, unemployment and ecological destruction; 3) to take concrete actions beyond fossil fuels, including speaking out against mountaintop removal and exploring opportunities for divestment; and 4) to partner with grassroots groups working for justice to learn from their experiences.

About the Catholic Committee of Appalachia

Since 1970, the Catholic Committee of Appalachia has existed to serve Appalachia, her poor and the entire web of creation. Mountaintop removal, labor, private prison development, sustainable lifestyles and communities, poverty, health, clean water, racism and climate change are among those issues which CCA has addressed. CCA was responsible for the organization and promulgation of two groundbreaking pastoral letters of the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, "This Land is Home to Me" (1975) and "At Home in the Web of Life" (1995).

The Coordinator of CCA, Jeannie Kirkhope, and the Chair of the Board of Directors, Brian DeRouen, are available for interviews about CCA's statement to the Appalachian bishops.

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