



CPF Bulletin Spring-Summer 2024



Fountain at the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Capitol Building in Harrisburg PA



Clean Water Action activists pose in front of PA capitol after a day of lobbying for environmental justice.

June 4th Lobby Day for Environmental Justice: Laudato Si in Action

by Barbara Sheehan, *Member, EcoPhilly and Laudato Si Circle, Our Mother of Consolation (OMC) Parish*

Since June of 2023, I have joined with our parish ministry to advocate for PA HB652, increasing permitting standards in environmental justice areas. Working for environmental justice (EJ) seemed the most appropriate political action for our group, which follows the teachings of the Pope's 2015 encyclical Laudato Si (Care for Creation). In Laudato Si, and its follow-up apostolic exhortation, Laudate Deum, Francis urges us to address our political and church leaders about the need to prioritize creation care.

However, recently I was having doubts about whether we could carry the torch for this bill alone. It seemed like an uphill battle, and I wondered if our time would be better spent on other projects.

But, on the morning of May 6, fate intervened. An email from the environmental organization Clean Water Action announced a statewide lobbying day in Harrisburg for Environmental Justice! We were invited to join others around the state to lobby legislators to support HB652,

Environmental Justice Permitting, as well as two other bills that addressed EJ issues: HB2238 Limiting use of PFAS chemicals, and SB767 a Low Income Household Water Assistance Program. A bus from Philadelphia would be provided for free as well as free lunches!

So...in the early morning of Tuesday, June 4, six members of our parish ministry, along with two others from churches we had met with around the bill, boarded a bus with a group of ~ 35 Philadelphia area advocates headed to Harrisburg.

I gave out Laudato Si stickers to those in our little group to acknowledge a Catholic presence for environmental justice. Two staff members from the Sisters of Saint Joseph Center for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, as well as a Sister of St. Joseph wore their bright aqua t-shirts with the Congregation's logo. The group on our bus included many young adults who worked as organizers or canvassers for or were members of Clean Water Action, and representatives from Southwest Philadelphia community groups where water, air, and ground pollution are critical issues. According to CWA organizer Maurice Sampson, it was the most diverse group they ever had for a lobby day.

I can only describe my first impression on entering the capitol building as "democracy in action." A cacophony of sound greeted us as we passed through security into an atrium where dozens of National Guard members in fatigues congregated within a ring of tables demonstrating weapons and military equipment. Large (and loud) groups of members of home health care advocates, several in wheelchairs, milled around the first floor and shared the seating/meeting space with our advocates outside the cafeteria. The SEIU union members chanted in the echoing hallways as we passed through to go to our meetings with legislators. Most of the big lobbying groups wore bright t-shirts identifying their allegiance. We EJ advocates did not have uniform apparel.



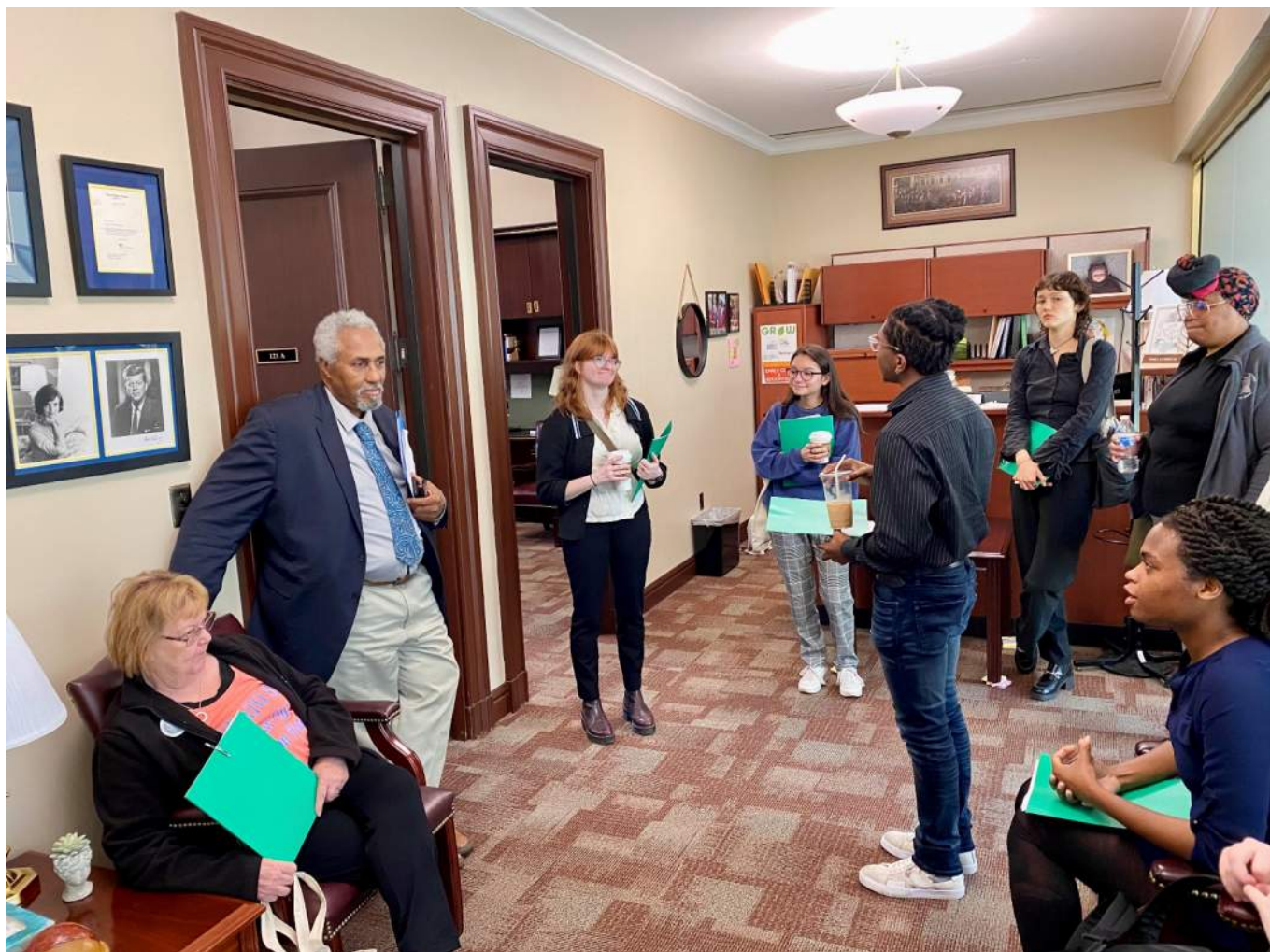
EcoPhilly members Kit McGovern and Julian Burnett strategizing in preparation for the next scheduled meeting with a legislator.

At that point I had to wonder how we could get our voices heard or even noticed in all the commotion.

Mr. Sampson had prepared a list of 19 political representatives and senators for Philadelphia area members to meet. He had scheduled appointments with each and assigned five or more advocates for each appointment.

Unfortunately, my first three appointments yielded little more than a walk through the halls of the capitol building and some photo ops in the offices of my local reps, Rep. Rabb and Rep. Kahn, who co-sponsored HB652, and Rep. Debra Bullcok, with whom the bill originated. Staff members told us that a mandatory ethics training session had been scheduled at the same time as our morning sessions, washing out our hopes of meeting individually with these “friends of HB652.”

The next item on the schedule was a press conference on the pristine front steps of the capitol, where the Representative Greg Scott, in a light blue suit, baseball cap, and sneakers, talked about HB2238, a bill to prohibit the manufacturing and sale of PFAS, the “forever chemicals” that have detrimental health effects on animals and humans. He was joined by several other legislators, including my own representative, Tarik Kahn.



Clean Water Action (CWA) organizer Maurice Sampson (in suit and tie) with advocates in the vestibule of Representative Tarik Kahn’s office.

Although our main focus for lobbying was the environmental justice permitting bill, I was proud to support this important legislation that will limit the PFAS chemicals in our water, and many products such as kids' toys, cookware, and dental floss. (For a further look at the history of PFAS litigation, see the excellent film *Dark Waters*, starring Mark Ruffalo, currently streaming on Netflix.)

During our lunch session, we heard from Rep. Greg Vitali, Chair of the Environmental Resources Committee; Rep. Joseph Hohenstein, who had in a former life worked as a canvasser for Clean Water Action; Rep. Tarik Kahn; Rep. Abigail Solisbury; and Rep. Chris Rabb, who advised and encouraged us as EJ advocates in PA.

In the afternoon, I joined the group that met with two staff members from Senator Anthony Williams office. Williams represents a section of Southwest Philadelphia, and our group of about 15 included many of his constituents who were fed up with the many pollutants to which they have been exposed.

I was most moved by a woman who makes home health visits in the area. She said that she speaks with mothers who are worried about the safety of their kids in the streets, education, and housing concerns, as well as health issues with their kids, such as the prevalence of childhood asthma. "They don't even know what is causing their kids to be sick, they are mostly worried about how to get them the medications they need," she said. "But we know. And this [exposure to toxins in the air and water] is one thing we should take off their plates."

That struck me, because that is something we as Catholics can do. We can take one thing off the plates of those who suffer the most from environmental degradation.

Everyone in our little group found the experience of participating in the lobby day to be energizing. We were educated about the issues, and found common ground with folks we had just met from our area and around the state. We represented ourselves as Catholics who were acting out the mission of *Laudato Si*.

The following are some reflections from some of our group of "climate ministers."

Kit McGovern

I got so much more than I bargained for. The Clean Water Action group prepared a detailed itinerary as well as background information on the three bills we were going to lobby for: HB 2238, HB 652, and HB 767.

Unfortunately, in spite of meticulous advance planning, none of the five legislators I was scheduled to meet with was available to meet with us personally. Two of the offices were expecting us and a senior staff member took meticulous notes and promised to convey our concerns to the legislator.

It was a learning experience in how government can work for the good of the people. It's hard and tedious and time consuming, but so worth it.

Julian Burnett

It was a very exciting day learning and lobbying with the various groups. I was amazed by the number of environmental issues there are and feel reassured that we are not alone in our efforts to care for creation!

It really hit me while listening and speaking to remember we were there as servants of Christ and to behave as such, no accusations or blaming—just honestly. I look forward to our group growing and having more congregations join us in the future.

Sister Donna Breslin, SBS

I think the beautiful weather added to the ability of the participants to come out and show their support to the speakers.



Representative Tarik Kahn with Katherine Finke, Donna Breslin, SBS, and Marjorie Lawless, SSJ on the Capitol steps following a press conference about the dangers of PFAS chemicals (HB2238)

Carolyn O'Donnell

Amazing to me how by showing up, and voicing one's concerns to our representatives that work gets done...I met Reps. Greg Scott, Amen Brown, heard from Greg Vitale, and others at lunch, met the assistants of Maria Collett. Our Clean Water Action (CWA) activist, Mercedes, was definitely including/prodding us to ask the Reps our questions. ... I think our group and CWA were multipliers for each other, especially since they were also advocating for HB 652. It was a

great day; for being so busy, everyone who worked there was so knowledgeable, helpful, and joyful. The people's house was definitely open for business.

Sister Marjorie Lawless, SSJ

As I reflect on my experience of stepping into our PA State Capitol, I was in awe of its size and beauty...I was impressed with the number of young adults who arrived with us to speak to our Representatives and State Senators about the need for clean water in our city now and for future generations. My heart feels the pain of the poor and their lack of access to clean drinking water. Earth and all of Creation, is crying out in pain. May this depth of pain move me to act out of love to advocate for Change.

How You Can Help

You can help advocate for environmental justice by supporting the three bills mentioned: HB652, HB6658, and HB 767. Sign a petition with Clean Water Action:

<https://cleanwater.salsalabs.org/pa-ej-bills-2024/index.html>

To request a speaker on Environmental Justice for your parish climate ministry, contact laudatosiomc@gmail.com



Some of the Clean Water Action and Environmental Justice activists pose before boarding the bus back to Philadelphia.

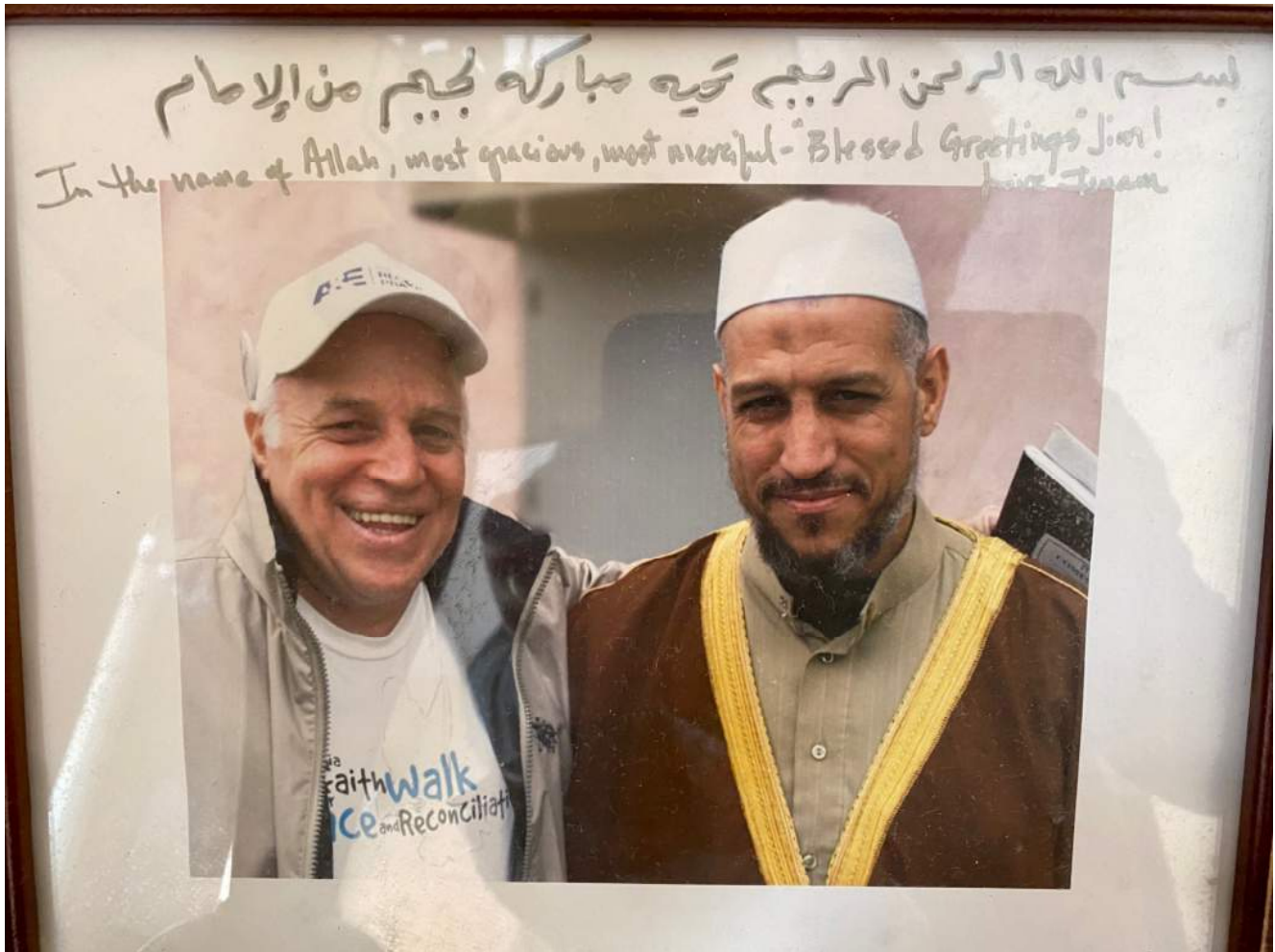


Image of the photo Jim kept on his nightstand at the nursing home where Jim ultimately finished his struggle with his Parkinson's.

Remembering Jim McGovern

Jim was an active participant in the Annual Philadelphia Interfaith Walk for Peace and Reconciliation; <https://www.interfaithpeacewalk.org/>. The image above was taken by fellow CPF members on an earlier visit to see him once pandemic restrictions were loosened. Before the pandemic and the worsening of his condition, Jim was a regular attendee of CPF, Jesu Caritas and Christian Meditation meetings; see the following Nov. 3rd notice. There are many photos of him helping collate the printed pre-pandemic CPF newsletter. CPF is grateful for Jim's life / love.

As many of us remember Jim, two additional consistent and endearing memories have been his commitment to those who struggle with addictions and the importance of the 12-step program. Jim is the author of books and Op-Eds (in the Inquirer and other local papers including the CPFNL), notably *You Can Go Home Again* and *Twelve Steps to Change Your World*.

[Twelve Steps to Change Your World : James F. McGovern Jr. : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](https://archive.org/details/twelvestepstocho0000jame)
<https://archive.org/details/twelvestepstocho0000jame>

[James F. McGovern Jr. Obituary \(2023\) - Philadelphia, PA - Boyd-Horrox-Givnish Funeral Home \(legacy.com\)](https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/name/james-mcgovern-obituary?id=52386874&utm_source=webshareapi&utm_medium=share_button&utm_campaign=wsapimobile_beta)
https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/name/james-mcgovern-obituary?id=52386874&utm_source=webshareapi&utm_medium=share_button&utm_campaign=wsapimobile_beta

Join us for Hospitality Nov 3 in St. Malachy Hall after 10 am Mass and celebrate Fr. Mac and CPFNL.

The Broad Street Run on the 1st Sunday in May put a damper on our plans for Hospitality that Sunday. The following has been updated and re-published since the last issue of the CPF newsletter (CPFNL).

<https://cpfphila.com/ARTICLES/2024%20MARCH/2024-03%20CPF%20Lent%20Newsletter.pdf>

Most first Sundays, St. Malachy parish invites parishioners and guests to a light hospitality after the Sunday mass in the former school hall. Usually, these 1st Sundays are sponsored by one or two parish groups. On Nov 3, 2024, CPF will cosponsor hospitality with two other groups, Jesu Caritas and Christian Meditation which like CPF have had Fr. McNamee as a long-time member. These three groups are not specifically parish groups, however many of us are also members of two parish groups who will also join us in this effort: St. Malachy Antiracism Committee and the Parish Decorating Committee. The occasion will also be a chance for members of each of these five groups to socialize with parishioners and guests as well as inform others of our missions. We hope CPF supporters and CPF newsletter subscribers can join us on the first Sunday of November 2024.

If you are interested in learning more about any of these groups sooner; please feel free to email us at CPFphila@gmail.com and please put the name of the group in the subject line. Briefly:

1. Jesu Caritas was initiated at St Malachy by a group of parishioners joining Fr. MacNamee and the late Sr. Cecile on a one-day retreat in Brooklyn with other Jesu Caritas groups, many decades ago. The group meets online using the same link as CPF at 9 am on the second Saturday of the month. For more information, please reach out to Pat Smyth or Lois Harris after the Sunday mass; <https://jesuscaritasusa.org/>.
2. Christian Meditation grew out of Jesu Caritas and was a special project of Sr. Cecile. Mike Gracia became the group's anchor after Sr. Cecile's health required her retirement as parish administrator. For over a decade Mike faithfully gathered us every Tuesday evening at 6:30 for a reflection and 20 minutes of silent meditation until his death in 2023. Please reach out to Lois Harris; <https://meditationtalks.wccm.org/>
<https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2021/04/28/pope-francis-general-audience-prayer-meditation-jesus-240547>
3. Parish Decorating Committee assists the pastor for preparation of the church for liturgical celebrations and in general; please reach out to Aileen McGovern after the Sunday mass.
4. St. Malachy Antiracism Committee was formed to respond to the mandate of "Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism." Please see Adaobi, Angie, Ava, Maria, or Naomi after mass; <https://www.newencounters.org/>
<https://www.usccb.org/resources/open-wide-our-hearts-enduring-call-love-pastoral-letter-against-racism> newencounterscatholics@gmail.com.
5. CPF Phila began as a Catholic response to the Vietnam war with Fr. MacNamee and Sr. Cecile Reiley as early members; <https://www.cpfphila.com/>
<https://www.cpfphila.com/ARTICLES/Sr.%20Cecile%20Reiley,%20Still%20With%20Us%20All%20These%20Years.html>

The Nov 3 gathering will also be a place for all of us who participated in CPF newsletter with our subscribers to commemorate the many years of the newsletter's existence.