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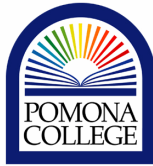
Justified By Faith: The Upper Susquehanna Lutheran Synod and the Pennsylvania Natural Gas Fracking Controversy

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Recommended Citation

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Justified By Faith:
*The Upper Susquehanna Lutheran Synod and the
Pennsylvania Natural Gas Fracking Controversy*

Lena R. Connor

*God writes the Gospel, not in the Bible alone, but also on trees,
and in the flowers and clouds and stars.*
-Martin Luther

In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis,
2012/13 academic year, Pomona College, Claremont, California

Readers: Char Miller, Susan McWilliams, and Jerry Irish



Acknowledgements:

Many thanks...

To those I interviewed in the Upper Susquehanna Synod, for welcoming me into your churches and homes and telling me your stories.

To Char Miller, Susan McWilliams, and Jerry Irish for constant affirmation, support, and guidance throughout the past few years and while writing this thesis.

To Warren Roberts, for a wonderful GIS tutorial.

To Aaron Routhe, for methodological advice.

To the National Council of Church Eco-Justice Program, for helping me find this case study.

To my wonderful family and friends, for your unconditional love.

But especially to my mother, who came with me on this Pennsylvania adventure and was a loyal and insightful companion, as she always is.

May God bless the members of the Upper Susquehanna Synod as they continue to grapple with the shale gas boom and its effects, granting them wisdom, unity, and strength, come what may...



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Introduction:

During the summer of 2012 in Washington D.C., Capitol Hill was abuzz with debate about the country's newest petrochemical extraction technique. Horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing for natural gas – also known as “fracking” – is the key to the country's next (and potentially final) frontier in our long legacy as a petroleum empire. One of the richest repositories of natural gas that fracking unlocks is the Marcellus Shale Formation, located primarily under Pennsylvania and New York, it is heralded as “the Saudi Arabia of natural gas,” and is the primary source of controversy. The Marcellus shale natural-gas fields are worth more than a trillion dollars, but are mined with the controversial extraction technique that threatens water sources.¹ Opponents, concerned about the social and environmental effects of the industrial venture, contend with staunch proponents, who are optimistic about the economic potential of a domestic fossil fuel source. As an intern for the National Council of Churches, I witnessed the conflict escalate on the hill and in the media, charged with political metaphor and ideological abstraction. To many of the politicians and activists alike, fracking was a symbol of our nation's priorities, a litmus test for our energy and economic future.

But if one leaves our nation's capitol, following the Chesapeake Bay up along the rivers that feed it, into the Susquehanna River Basin in Pennsylvania, fracking is not an abstraction, but a reality. There, another democratic intuition also deliberated about fracking this summer, but the terms of its debate on the issue had a different grounding entirely. On June 15 and 16, I sat in an auditorium observing two hundred Lutherans discussing what the booming fracking industry in their area meant for their community and for their faith. The Upper Susquehanna Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), a representative assembly of 131

¹ Charles Hardy III. “Using the Environmental History of the Commonwealth to Enhance Pennsylvania and U.S. History Courses.” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 79, no. 4 (2012): 477.

Lutheran congregations in North Central Pennsylvania, decided that the shale gas extraction deserved attention at their annual Synod Assembly in Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania. The Upper Susquehanna Synod is one of the sixty-five synods of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the primary Lutheran denomination in the United States.² The synod's congregations are located in the counties of Mifflin, Juniata, Snyder, Union, Northumberland, Columbia, Montour, Lycoming, Clinton, & Tioga, which lie over the Marcellus Shale. In the span of a few short years, the natural gas boom has quickly engulfed the whole synod, especially the northern counties, in which there are now thousands of shale gas wells.

After a heated debate between synod members about the ethics of the industry, the synod passed two resolutions and one memorial regarding the natural gas industry and the risks and benefits of the hydraulic-fracturing technique.³ The first resolution calls for the synod to establish a task force to comprehensively research and assess the eco-justice issues surrounding fracking, including the safety of water resources, public-health threats, ecological conservation, effects on local and impoverished communities, and influences on rural development. It also calls on synod leaders and congregants to organize grassroots dialogue on fracking and to use theological resources to resolve conflict and moral confusion about the new industry.

The second resolution expresses that the synod's public stance on the issue, calling for a statewide moratorium on the issuing of future permits for hydraulic fracturing "until long-range, comprehensive studies about the cumulative effects of air and water pollution, water resource depletion, public health endangerment, and other possible impacts from the drilling and fracturing processes have been completed." It also asks national and state legislators to mandate full and public disclosure of chemicals used in all stages of the drilling process;

² The ELCA is "Evangelical" in name only, and not in theology or political leanings. It is a mainline Protestant denomination and a politically progressive body.

³ See Appendices A-C for full texts.

eliminate the mandatory signing of non-disclosure agreements by physicians, patients and workers about health effects of fracking chemicals; monitor and reduce harmful impacts around hydraulic fracturing sites; protect the rights of local municipalities to regulate the shale gas drilling; and to develop sustainable energy sources that could act as alternatives to fossil fuel use and to enforce energy conservation. It resolved to send this position to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy, the Director of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the Pennsylvania State Representatives and Senators that serve the synod counties, and the other ELCA Synods within the Marcellus Shale region.

Finally, the memorial to the national body of the church calls for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to establish its own task force on hydraulic fracturing to inform the national church's public stance and action on the issue. The memorial includes the official position of the Upper Susquehanna Synod and suggests that the national body adopt it as well. It resolves that the synod will reach out to other synods in the national conference affected by natural gas hydraulic fracturing to help all Lutheran churches in the nation address this issue in a theological manner.

The discourse within a group of Lutherans in rural Pennsylvania might seem inconsequential compared to the legislative fights in Congress, the thousands of fracking protestors in the nation's metropolises, and the coverage in international media. But the dialogue that took place that day among a group of humble Lutherans was quite significant to those interested in the Christian environmental movement. Not only is the synod one of the first – if not *the* first – Christian church body to take a position on the new extractive boom that promises to greatly alter our American energy landscape, but the event also has a deep theological and cultural significance due to the historical relationship between Pennsylvania

Lutherans and America's industrial development. Moreover, the ethical complexity represented in the debates between synod members about fracking demonstrates the quandaries that such economic and ecological change presents to rural America and to any church attempting to theologically address the issue.

Reverend Leah Schade, a pastor in the synod and one of the authors resolutions and the memorial, declared in a public statement after the Synod Assembly: "There is a wide range of stances on this issue within the Lutheran church. Some are benefitting financially from the industry, but many are concerned about the safety of human health and God's creation. I am very proud to be a member of a church body that has so courageously exercised its role in public theology, making sure that Lutherans claim a voice on this highly controversial issue."⁴

An Exercise in Applied Ecotheology:

My enthusiasm for this case study stems from a blossoming interest in a field of Christian thought entitled *ecotheology*. While initially an attempt to articulate Christian philosophy on the non-human entities within Creation, ecotheology is now growing into a comprehensive theological movement that attempts to create ethics that will be useful and applicable for religious practitioners facing the question: What is Christian community and healing on a planet rife with ecological illness? A diverse range of theologians, from every denomination of Christianity, has been working for several decades to plumb the depths of scripture, classical theology, tradition, and current revelation for insight into how we should approach human vocation within Creation in a Christ-like fashion. Some scholars such as Lynn White, Jr., have accused Christianity of being historical complacent on ecological issues – even a primary source of our industrial paradigm. But many modern Christians are working hard to either prove this assertion wrong or, if they agree with White, to redeem this failing. They are

⁴ "News: Fracking Resolutions." *Upper Susquehanna Synod Blog*, June 20, 2012. <http://usselca.wordpress.com/2012/06/20/news-fracking-resolutions/>, 1.

crafting new theological theory to address the eco-justice dilemmas of the twenty-first century and are finding historical and current examples of Christian communities that have crafted their lifestyles to facilitate the renewing of creation and community.

This project has personal significance, too: I hope to join this community as a Christian ecological ethicist, using theological and ethnography research methodology to gain insight into how ecotheology can be applied to renew communities in a century faced with climate change, dwindling water resources, land degradation, agricultural stagnation, habitat loss, industrial waste and pollution, and the myriad of other problems we will face in the coming decades. In my experience growing up in rural Florida, I witnessed the current trajectory of capitalist development fail my small agricultural community, exacerbating social insecurity, racial tension, and communal conflict. It is this conflict – this this foundering of relationship – that I believe is at the heart of our ecological woes.

Wendell Berry, an author and a farmer who is I believe is a pioneer in the Christian environmental movement in America, argues that our individualistic search for material abundance leads to the commodification of all of creation and even our fellow human beings. This thirst for wealth inhibits our ability to engage in the relational richness that Christ offers us. When Jesus said to have life abundantly, Berry maintains, he meant that life is “not reducible by division, category, or degree, but is one thing, heavenly and earthly, spiritual and material, divided only insofar as it is embodied in distinct creatures.”⁵ In an age when we have systematized relational abuse and ecological sin, the challenge for Christians is to find alternative models of community that reflect this vision – this kingdom of heaven, in theological terms. As Berry puts it: “If we take the Gospels seriously, we are left, in our dire predicament, facing an utterly humbling question: How must we live and work so as not to be estranged

⁵ Wendell Berry. *The Way of Ignorance: And Other Essays*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2005, 136.

from God's presence in His work and in all His creatures? The answer, we may say, is given in Jesus's teaching about love. But that answer raises another question that plunges us into the abyss of our ignorance, which is both human and peculiarly modern: How are we to make that love an economic practice?"⁶

Deciphering what is economically loving in the labyrinth of decision making in our globalized world is often a challenge. Differing interpretations of righteous action can lead to tensions within Christian community, often compounded with tensions caused by the strife and stress of societal living. Thus any ecotheology cannot expect that good relational theory alone will facilitate healing in real communities. The application of such ideas must involve an inclusive and collaborative process, as Christians try to make decisions about issues as complicated as fracking.

Ecotheology must also be cognizant of ecological imperatives and the lessons that God demonstrates to us in the natural world. We can learn much for the renewing and creative logic of ecosystems, which do not need money and fossil fuels to produce in abundance and beauty. As John Scotus Eriugena, a 9th Century Irish theologian, says, "As Christ wears 'two shoes' in the world: Scripture and nature. Both are necessary to understand the Lord, and at no stage can creation be seen as a separation of things from God." Or as St. Augustine expressed in the 4th century, "Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?"

Interested in finding a Christian community that was both attuned to ecology and adept at resolving conflict caused by environmental degradation, I traveled in the summer of 2011 to

⁶ Berry, 137.

the Atlantic Forest in Brazil to research how a group of Franciscan Catholic priests were helping their parishioners grapple with a bauxite mining initiative that was strip-mining their forests and farmland and threatening their water sources. The church was a place for advocacy, dialogue, and communal prayers that God would protect their families and their land. The Franciscans were emblems of good eco-theology, demonizing no one, but firmly valuing life above aluminum. As one priest said:

The reason I'm against mining is because it is aggressive to the world. It is attacking the whole system. When we talk about mining, my view is that we need to preserve the earth. But also, we need to preserve economic integrity for the people who live on the earth, and the quality of life here, etc. [Mining] affects the whole ecosystem, and it tends to have the greatest effect on the simpler people.

But when he and his brethren led the church on the issue, they did so in a graceful way that made sure that members of the congregation felt included and respected in the decision making process. Yet most of their parishioners grew up in the age of Latin American liberation theology and are familiar with the work of Brazilian ecotheologians like Ivone Gebara and Leonardo Boff, so the wedding of social and ecological issues with theology was a familiar concept to them.

In the United States, by contrast, partisan schisms and lack of religious commentary on economic and environmental decision-making combine to produce a cultural climate that is less conducive to such ecotheological discourse within churches, particularly within white Protestant churches. After arriving back in the U.S., I was eager to locate a group of American Christians attempting to tackle an issue as notable as bauxite mining, for the purposes of comparison. In particular, I wanted to find a group in a rural region of the United States, as often the urban-rural disconnect in religious and political discourse in American can be a large factor in the effectiveness of ecotheological rhetoric. So I was grateful to find this synod of Lutherans in Pennsylvania that is addressing natural gas fracking. I have to thank the National

Council of Churches for helping me locate this group and the Upper Susquehanna Synod itself, for generously allowing me to observe and research their community.

Research Purpose and Methodology:

This thesis employs a combination of theological, environmental, historical, and ethnographic research methodologies to ground my analysis of how this synod of Lutherans to date has approached the fracking boom. The primary question that I wish to answer in this thesis is the following: How might the Upper Susquehanna Synod of the ELCA, as a representative body of Lutheran churches that are steeped in tradition, use its history, community involvement, theology, and church structure to address an ecological quandary like fracking? I will answer this question in four sections, with each chapter focusing on a different thematic sub-question. Though I borrow techniques from the social sciences, I have written this thesis as a narrative to draw the reader into this fascinating community. Instead of separating my literature review from my ethnographic data, I will blend the two together in each chapter, weaving together quotes from synod members with secondary source material. Embedded throughout the report are also maps that I have produced using a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technique to give the story a spatial dimension. Additionally, I use photographs of the synod counties to enhance the reader's understanding of the region's ecological and cultural landscapes.

The first chapter delves into the history of the synod area, focusing on its agricultural and industrial legacies as well as the role of Lutheranism in relation to those legacies. The second chapter gives an explanation of the technicalities of natural gas horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing and will be an exploration of how the shale gas boom is affecting the synod – ecologically, ethically, socially, and economically. The third chapter explains some of the ecotheological resources available to the synod as they wrestle with the ethics of fracking,

with an emphasis on work by Lutheran theologians, the purpose of which is to ground the thesis in theology. The fourth chapter investigates how the synod is aiming to apply this ecotheology and guide its congregants through this difficult issue while maintaining peace and cohesion within its churches. Finally, the concluding chapter ties these four sections, with their distinct methodologies, together to directly answer the primary research question and to analyze how this case study can shed light onto how other Christian bodies might approach similar potentially divisive ecological issues.

The interview data that I use in this report were collected during my travels in the synod in August of 2012. After attending the Synod Assembly in June and conducting informal, short interviews with synod members during that event, I then returned to the synod to do in depth interviews with 18 pastors, lay leaders, and congregants in the Upper Susquehanna Synod.⁷ My selection technique was far from random, which means that these interviews are not a perfect representation of synod opinion. Rather, due to time constraints and my unfamiliarity with the community, I only reached out to individuals that the synod office or church leaders suggested and interviewed all who were willing to speak to me.

This selection technique means that I spoke with synod members who were likely more opinionated on the issue than the average person in the churches' pews. However, I attempted to interview participants from a wide spectrum of opinion on the shale gas industry and from dispersed geographical locations within the synod. I also tried to balance pastors and lay members. I interviewed eight pastors, one lay leader on the synod staff, one theology professor at a local Lutheran seminary, two gas workers, two congregational lay leaders, and four congregants from a range of professions. All told, with several pastors leading more than one church, these interviewees represent fifteen congregations in the synod. In my selection, I also

⁷ See Appendix D for Interview Record.

attempted to account for age and gender, though I unfortunately was not entirely successful in this effort. I ended up interviewing more men than woman and no one under the age of 25.

I initiated the interviews only after receiving written informed consent. Because of the sensitivity of issue and out of courtesy for the privacy of those that I interviewed, I have changed all the names in this report and use no personal identifiers such as church names or specific job locations or titles. In every manner, I strive to abide by the Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association,⁸ to minimize harm, to ask open and affirming questions, and to respect the communities that I observed throughout my time in Pennsylvania. And as a theologian, I aim to abide by the codes of my faith, attempting to have compassion and understanding for all involved and to allow the Spirit to guide my research and inform my comprehension.

Though I spoke with many people during my visits to churches and to the Synod Assembly, in this report I will only use quotes from the 18 participants with whom I conducted extended, formal interviews. The interviews normally lasted for one to three hours. Most were with only one individual, though a few were with family groups of two or three. I had a rubric of prepared questions, but I only used these as guidelines and let the conversations flow naturally, in order to set the interviewees at ease and let them lead the conversation. I found that this yielded richer and more informative responses. Because I am approaching this project from a theological perspective, I was open about my own faith tradition and engaged with my interviewees in a mutual understanding of shared belief. I find that this method leads to deeper theological insight.

⁸ "Code of Ethics of the American Anthropological Association," *American Anthropological Association*, Approved June 1998, <<http://www.aaanet.org/committees/ethics/ethicscode.pdf>>.

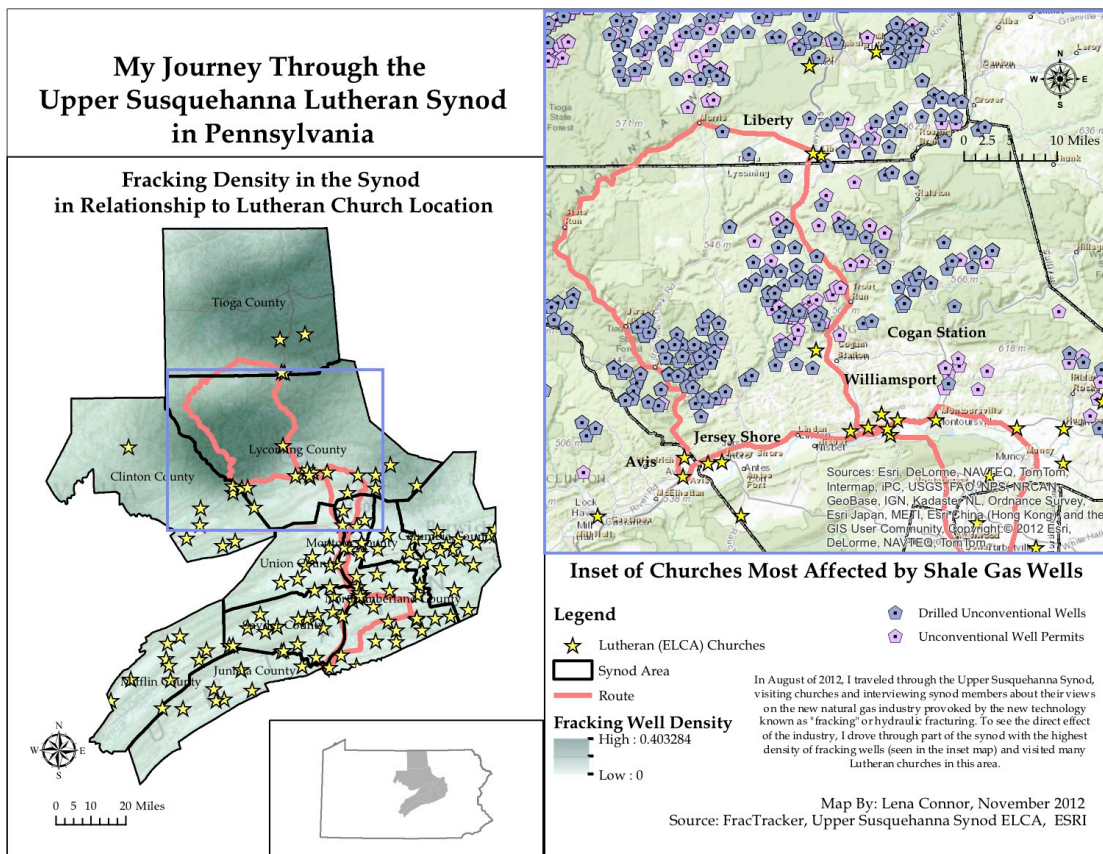
The Landscapes of the Upper Susquehanna Synod:

My weeklong journey through the Upper Susquehanna Synod began by driving up from Harrisburg along the wide banks of the Susquehanna River, encompassed by the rolling wooded hills and farmland of the synod's southern counties. I first stopped in Lewisburg (in Union County), where the Synod Office is located, to interview several pastors and synod staff members. A cheerful town, home of Bucknell University, it has a vibrant downtown full of art stores, lovely cafes, and a farmers market. Nearby Selinsgrove (in Snyder County), which contains of Susquehanna University (founded by Lutherans), where the Synod Assembly was held, is similarly quaint. The towns that surround these counties in the south reminded me of Iowa farming towns, with acres of corn, soybeans, and pasture. Mennonite and Amish buggies mingle with cars along the highway and white farmhouses and red barns dot the landscape.

If you look closer, you see the large chicken houses and other signs of industrial farming that keep agriculture economically viable in the region. But the region is still reminiscent of a past agrarian era. The universities and the large hospital, Geisinger Medical Center, along with factory farming, buoy these southern counties economically. To a stranger, there are few obvious signs of fracking down in this southern region, as there are no wells in these counties. But though those I interviewed pointed out that trucking and water companies have sprouted up, hotels are bursting with gas workers, and support industries such as contractors have their business hubs in the area. They also pointed to the tanker trucks that drive through town, carrying fracking wastewater to and from the wells.

After stopping at several charming churches nestled in the valleys around Lewisburg, I drove north along the river to the three large northern counties – Tioga, Clinton, and Lycoming – to see the region that is actively being drilled and fracked. When you cross the bend in the Susquehanna, and enter into the larger town of Williamsport (in Lycoming County), the

geography and the culture change dramatically. The farmland turns into densely wooded foothills and mountains, and the towns are far from cheerful. Williamsport, once one of the wealthiest towns in America because of lumber, is visibly economically depressed, with old Victorian mansions sagging in disrepair and a worn-down main street. Residents say crime is high and morale is low. Jersey Shore, a town west of Williamsport with a curious name, was also in sad shape when I visited, despite the surge of gas work in the area. Poverty was obvious and the downtown was dead. The land here is too mountainous to farm profitably and so the economy of this area relies on the temporary industries that pass through on occasion, such as timber, coal, and manufacturing. There is a palpable difference between the auras of the north and the south of the synod. The mountainous northern section seems to lack life. People are more gruff and reserved, as is typical of a rust belt and Appalachia.



Map 1: My Journey Through the Synod; Source: Lena Connor

On a rainy Sunday, I visited several churches in the area to interview parishioners and to observe the services in the small congregations. Despite the gloomy nature of the towns, I found the services to be uplifting. The congregants were reserved, but polite – much less gregarious than their southern counterparts but still willing to talk to me and quite eager to speak about fracking, which is now part of their everyday life. As you can see on the map above, their communities lie just beneath an area with thousands of shale gas wells, most of which have been drilled within the past five years due to the advent of the fracking technique. Many either work for the gas companies, have family members who do, or have land with gas wells.

In Avis (in Clinton County), parishioners gave me directions to go see the well pads in the mountains to the north, just ten minutes from the town. As I drove along the mountain road, occasionally crossing iron bridges over the picturesque mountain streams, I passed dozens of dirt roads with chained-off entrances, with gas company logos. Through the trees, bright green in the summer season, I could see the metal towers of the well pads and hear the metal clanking of machinery. I passed few passenger cars but many large tanker trucks, as they carried either gas or frack fluids down the narrow, curving road. From time to time, I came to the small villages that lie on the banks of the creeks, once either lumber or mining villages connected by railroad tracks. Along the road were houses and cabins nestled in the woods, many quite near the gas wells.

I went as far north as the township of Liberty (in Tioga County), the home of a pastor and his wife that I interviewed in Lewisburg. There, small dairy farms are directly adjacent to well pads. A line of windmills is visible on top of nearby mountain ridge, but I was aware that the vast majority of fuel being harnessed in the region was of the fossil fuel variety. After nearly a full day driving through the area, I headed back south to the small town of Cogan Station,

north of Williamsport (in Lycoming County), to interview another pastor, Rev. Bernhard Engel, at a church surrounded by wells. Rev. Engel walked me around the grounds and the cemetery of the church, pointing to the strip of cleared land where a gas pipeline was to be installed. At night, the hills surrounding the church light up with gas flares, which is eerily beautiful he says, but unsettling.

Finally, I made my way back south to Lewisburg for more interviews and then continued on to the town of Shamokin, southeast of Lewisburg (in Northumberland County), in the old coal district of the synod. Like its industrial counterparts in the north of the synod, the town was run-down and solemn. The pastor at the Lutheran church in Shamokin, Rev. Paul Lehrer, says that the coal boomtown has been in a rut since the 1950s, when coal left, unable to recover from the identity crisis due to the economic void. The low property values, due to the lack of industry and the pollution from the coal mining have made the town a haven for low-income people. Rev. Lehrer explains that he and a few others have hopes that the town will find renewal. In the meantime, there are certainly plenty of people in need to serve as a church, so he rarely feels bored. But he admits that when he thinks of the shale gas boom – of fracking – he sees what other fossil fuel endeavors have done to the town he lives in and frets for the future of the synod area.

As I left the synod, I drove once again along the Susquehanna River, as I had when I entered, but I looked at its shining surface in a new light. After a brief week of immersion in the synod – in the lives of these Lutheran communities – I paradoxically felt both a deeper sense of fear and a deeper sense of hope for the synod as they tackle this new gas industry. The river I gazed at is certainly in danger, as are those living beings that dwell in its watershed. But there is also a wealth of people in the synod – regardless of their personal opinions on fracking – who

care about their homeland immensely and want to see it protected both culturally and environmentally.

In the following chapters, I hope to give you a small sample of this depth of feeling among the Lutheran pastors and parishioners in the synod, as well as to complement their concerns and hopes about the gas industry with scholarly analysis of the topics that they address. I quote often because I feel that those I interviewed articulate their opinions better than I could ever paraphrase them. The language that they use, be it theological or not, is poignant and descriptive. You will see that their perspectives are diverse – but that despite this difference of opinion, their care for the Upper Susquehanna Synod, as both a geographical space and as a community of believers, is palpable.



Figure 1: Pine Creek (Lycoming County)
Source: Lena Connor



Figure 2: Factory Farm (Union County)
Source: Lena Connor

Chapter I: The History of Lutheranism and Industry in Pennsylvania

The earth shall be utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled; for the Lord has spoken this word. The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt; therefore the inhabitants of the earth dwindle, and few people are left.

- Isaiah 24:3-6

Fracking and Environmental History in the Synod:

Throughout the debate at the Synod Assembly and often during interviews, synod members spoke of fracking in relationship to the long history of extractive industry in Pennsylvania. Many older members of the synod have lived in the area their whole lives and can recall the legacy of the lumber, coal, oil, iron, and steel industries that shaped their area and those industries' interaction with the traditional farming economy. Rev. Ruth Erikson, a young leader in the synod, says that the synod counties have some of the highest rates of people who are born in the area remaining there; up to 95 percent of residents in many of the counties were born in that county. Stories about the past play a strong role in any dialogue in which the synod engages.

When William Penn founded Pennsylvania, he marveled at its lush, fertile land and old-growth forests, but did not foresee the wealth that lay beneath them. As historian Charles Hardy III says, "Pennsylvania's agricultural bounty was matched by the abundance of its other natural resources. The vast forests and extensive deposits of iron ore, anthracite and bituminous coal, and oil transformed Pennsylvania into an industrial powerhouse."⁹ Environmental historians Brian Black and Marcy Ladson state that for the past 150 years, "ground zero for Americans' harvest and management of energy resources has been the Commonwealth of

⁹ Hardy, 477.

Pennsylvania.”¹⁰ The vast amount of fossil fuel resources in Pennsylvania, and its proximity to the large port cities of the east coast, made the state the origin of America’s industrial revolution.

Hardy summarizes the history of the energy regimes in Pennsylvania well:

The Commonwealth was home to more than 95 percent of the anthracite coal in the Western Hemisphere and vast deposits of bituminous coal, the birthplace of the world oil industry (Titusville 1859), the first successful three-wire electric lighting system in the United States (Sunbury in 1883), the world’s first large-scale nuclear powerplant (Shippingport, 1957), and the nation’s worst nuclear accident (Three Mile Island, 1979). And it was its location at the confluences of three rivers and its proximity to the Pittsburgh seam, a vast deposit of bituminous coal that produced the nation’s best coking coal, which enabled Pittsburgh to become the steel capital of the world.¹¹

Pennsylvania, once humble farm country, became a coffer of mineral wealth and altered the fate of the United States, propelling it into industrial wealth and power that would eventually lead to its global hegemony. Pennsylvania created the empires of six of the twenty richest men in American History: John D. Rockefeller, Stephen Girard, Jay Gould, Andrew Carnegie, Andrew Mellon, and Richard Mellon.¹²

But as Black and Ladson remind us, the costs that Pennsylvania bore in order to supply the country with such power were great, though the Commonwealth has shown “a clear willingness – even a propensity – to tolerate those costs.”¹³ The ecosystem degradation caused by the rounds of industrial development, coupled with the health effects of the large amounts of

¹⁰ Brian Black and Marcy Ladson. “The Legacy of Extraction: Reading Patterns and Ethics in Pennsylvania’s Landscape of Energy.” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 79, no. 4 (2012): 878

¹¹ Hardy, 477.

¹² *Ibid.*, 481.

¹³ Black and Ladson, 878.

pollution, left a lasting mark on both rural and urban Pennsylvania. Today, it is home to ninety-five active Superfund sites, 18 counties with F-grade levels of pollution, and cities with some of the worst air quality in the country.

Some synod members view the history of Pennsylvania's industrial history as a cautionary tale that makes them anxious about the latest economic boom to hit the Keystone State, fracking. Rev. Bernhard Engel, who pastors many Lutheran churches in the mountainous counties north of Williamsport, where much of the gas wells are located, says that the identity of the region has been shaped for two centuries by extractive industry:

It is part of the history of this area. There was the lumbering boom that stripped everything. And then there was the coal that did significant environmental damage. The mountain that is to that side [of the church], there is coal right on top of it. And they [mined] that in the 1950s. They basically stripped the mountain from the top. And people tell me that there was a first layer of coal. And there was a layer of clay that was used for bricks. But when the brickmaking was not profitable, they would dump it in the valley and move on to the next layer of coal.

But other members speak of the history as a narrative of progress, of lessons learned the hard way that will ensure the gas industry would not make the same mistakes. Mr. Ed Hoffmann, a member of a Lutheran church in Mazeppa, near Lewisburg, says that he knew the older industries made a lot of mistakes, but he is hopeful about the environmental effect of fracking:

At one time if you would have drove through the upper parts of this county, the mountains were bare, because of the lumber industry. And the interesting thing is that if you go up and look today even with the fracking, there are no signs of clear cutting. And we didn't do right with lumber. But will we do right with gas? Well, I think we've learned a lot.

Either way, the new gas boom has synod members thinking about their state's environmental history, which Hardy argues is a healthy thing, as such an endeavor "forces us again to grapple with enduring questions about power, property rights, wealth transfer, public health, the

relationship of government and the free market, taxation, and our relationship with and responsibilities to the natural world.”¹⁴

It is those “enduring questions” that I will examine in this chapter, as I study how the Lutheran members connect fracking to the history of land use and economic structures in their synod. But I will also investigate the history of how Christianity, and in particular Pennsylvania Lutherans, interacted with industrial and environmental change in the state. For just as fracking has deep ethical dimensions for modern Lutherans in the synod, in light of climate change, human health, protection of Creation, and economic justice, so did the first industries in Pennsylvania. As Black and Ladson explain: “Acquiring these fuel resources [in Pennsylvania] in sufficient quantities took time and required a complete reorganization of human activities and living patterns. This shift toward industrialization represents one of the great technological undertakings of human history. Although remarkable innovations converted inanimate energy into products of all types, at the most basic level industrialization was constructed on a foundation of shifting priorities and ethics.”¹⁵ From the very beginning of industrialization in Pennsylvania, Lutherans had strong opinions on the changes they saw taking place in their communities and to their land. Such a historical grounding can give us a depth of understanding to our analysis of the synod’s reactions to the morality of the current gas industry.

The History of Industry in the Synod:

The environmental and cultural history of the synod is very dependent on geographical landscape. The mountain valleys in the south of the synod near the river, such as in Lewisburg, Selinsgrove, and Sunbury and the surrounding small farming areas are very fertile. Historically, those areas have been dominated by family farming and still are today – with Mennonite

¹⁴ Hardy, 490.

¹⁵ Black and Ladson, 878.

farmers and family-owned factory farms. Synod members tell me that these regions tend to have stable economies and that church communities are the healthiest in the synod. In contrast, the mountain ranges in the south and the north of the synod have a long history of extractive booms and busts, due to their rich mineral stocks and the unviability of large farms. The churches in these regions, especially in the north, are diminishing in size.

Rev. Dr. Robin Vogt, a professor of ecotheology at the local Lutheran seminary who researches the environmental history of rural Pennsylvania, explains that in the 1800s, industry would import whole groups of European people to work in the mines in the state:

Whole villages came from Sweden, Hungary, Italy, [etc.] and they would put them in a patch, so they could mine and live there. Or they'd bring them into Pittsburg and they'd put them in a neighborhood and build them a church and they would work a steel mill. Carnegie did that. You had ethnic churches all through Pittsburg.

In the synod area in particular, many Scandinavian Lutherans were imported to live in the mountain communities. Rev. Engel says that he still pastors a small Swedish community that once was a large Swedish mining camp.

In fact, Rev. Engel describes the region he covers, north of Williamsport, as full of small communities that are the last remaining of mining communities that once inhabited the mountains:

Over the past 12 years, I have been involved in all the churches from here to the northern state line. So I have covered a fairly large area here. And every valley is really distinctively different. And here you have this mix with the coal, iron, and the farming land. I have a couple of folks that were involved in the strip mining up there [on that mountain]. Years ago, there was an oil well in this village. And at one time, in the early 1800s, there were a couple of iron mines on the other side of that mountain. Half an hour north, you have typical mining villages that haven't seen mining in 50 years. And they have nothing else, so people move away.

Cities and towns that once were had thousands of mine workers and their families are either empty or blighted. Once the industry ends, it does not need the workers, says Rev. Dr. Vogt, and the industries that follow, such as fracking, often do not need their labor. So the people are

a liability to the government and are really just sort of in the way for current industries like the gas companies. He observes that this is true of immigrant communities after booms ended through American history.

The town of Shamokin, in the coal region in the South of the synod is one such place; it has not fared well since the coal industry there died. Rev. Paul Lehrer, who pastors the Lutheran church there, says that he fears that fracking is inevitable, due to the history of decision making about industry in Pennsylvania:

It's a done deal, because we aren't going to stop it. But look at New York State. They have a moratorium because they have these pristine places, like the Finger Lakes. They don't allow some of the things that Pennsylvania has always allowed. We have this mindset here that Pennsylvania is for exploitation and you can see it right here.

Black and Ladson echo these concerns about fracking, stating that the “governing principle” behind much of Pennsylvania’s energy decisions has been an “ethic of extraction” which moves from one resource to another as each is exploited. “One key feature of this ethic is transience,” they argue.¹⁶ Historian Philip Scranton argues that this opportunistic approach to development in Pennsylvania, led to “congeries of loosely connected processes” that transcended the state’s borders and failed to obey its rules and regulations.¹⁷ By allowing industry to enter in without questioning, Pennsylvania lost full control over the fate of its landscapes and communities from an early stage, as it became a treasure trove for a new global explosion of development.

Pennsylvania has made several attempts to rein in the effects of industry on its water, air and ecosystems. Philadelphia, citing water pollution, became the first city in British North America, in 1767, to pass pollution-control legislation and to provide drinking water to its citizens.¹⁸ Later on, in the mid twentieth century, the pollution of the industrial revolution, causing tragedies such as the killer fog in Donora, Pennsylvania, provoked the state to pass

¹⁶ Black and Ladson, 879.

¹⁷ Philip Scranton. “Conceptualizing Pennsylvania’s Industrializations, 1850-1950.” *Pennsylvania History* 61, no. 1 (January 1, 1994): 8.

¹⁸ Hardy, 483.

progressive pollution control legislation. These efforts give synod members such as Mr. Hoffmann hope that the state will be vigilant with fracking regulation. However, the legacies of each large industry in the synod still loom large in synod members' consciousness and it is important to briefly look into each of them.



Fig. 3: Public Mural in Williamsport (Lycoming County); Source: Lena Connor

Lumber in the Synod:

The first industry that swept many of the synod's counties was the lumber industry. In the 17th century, trees covered more than 90 percent of Pennsylvania. But to provide fuel for homes, businesses, the iron and coal industry, and the railroad industry, loggers cut all of the forests down by the twentieth century. Williamsport, now an economically challenged city, was once the timber capitol of the nation, home to "per capita to the most millionaires in the nation,"

says Hardy.¹⁹ The original lumber barons used the Susquehanna River to float logs downstream to the industrial centers of Pennsylvania.

Rev. Dr. Vogt says that he always starts the Pennsylvania environmental history portion of his ecotheology class with lumber:

I start it back with timber. The state was denuded of timber by the late 1870s. The father of forestry in Pennsylvania is Joseph T. Rothrock and he argued that we needed an alternative plan [for forestry]. He argued that the mountains were going to wash into the sea if we didn't reforest them. But they really have bounced back quite a bit between then and now.

Some synod members see the despoliation associated with lumber not as a warning, but as a contrast to modern, improved industrial practices. Mr. Justin Heinz, a member of a Lutheran church near Williamsport in the town of Avis, says that he has no worries about fracking in comparison to lumber:

We've seen much worse [than fracking]. Go back and look at the old lumber pictures. These hills had nothing on them. They were just bald. Much of it has grown back, but it's all hardwoods. Pennsylvania was all hemlock. And the American chestnut is gone.

But Rev. Tom Schumann, who lived for many years in the small town of Liberty, north of Williamsport in the old lumber areas, says that he sees fracking as an extension of the same mindset that fueled the lumber boom:

Pennsylvania is used to being raped. The lumber came in, the coal came in, they took what they wanted away and left a mess. And this is just another phase of that happening. When you're in an export economy, you're left with the mess and you're not getting much out of it.

But Ed Hoffmann disagrees, citing the regrowth of forests after the clear-cuts. Rev. Adler pointed out that this remediation was slow and laborious and the ecosystem vitality is still not what it once was.

¹⁹ Hardy, 480.



Fig. 4: Shamokin Coal Come Pile; Source: Lena Connor

Coal in the Synod:

But Pennsylvania's transition from an organic economy (of the farm) to a mineral economy (of industrial production) did not take place until the state's coal began to be mined and used in large quantities. The use of bituminous coal came first, to heat homes and buildings, but soon it was discovered that anthracite coal, which contains a higher percentage of carbon, could be used to reach higher temperatures and smelt iron. The resulting coal boom enabled Pennsylvania to create large iron and steel factories, to fuel manufacturing, and to enable urbanization. Many at the time believed that an anthracite trade in Pennsylvania would lead to great economic prosperity and help the United States compete with European powers. Thomas Cooper, a nineteenth century professor of chemistry, expressed this idea: "In this country every suggestion that brings forward the importance of coal to the public view is of moment: we know little of its value in Pennsylvania as yet. All, all the superior wealth, power

and energy of Great Britain, is founded on her coal mining.”²⁰ If Pennsylvanians could develop an anthracite trade, many believed it would lead to personal, regional, and national economic growth.

Anthracite coal “changed the structural possibilities for processes such as urbanization and industrialization in antebellum America,” claims historian Christopher F. Jones. “When we examine the relationships between land, energy, and society, the concept of organic and mineral economies helps us see the deep interconnections between fossil fuel energy and the ways we live,” he observes.²¹ Jones argues that the use of coal economically benefitted those living in cities and disadvantaged those living in rural areas, particularly those in the coal mining regions who worked in the dangerous mines with little pay and who lived in the scarred and poisonous environment surrounding the mines.²² In the nineteenth century, as population growth boomed in Pennsylvania’s cities and the return on investment skyrocketed,²³ poverty in the Appalachian regions of Pennsylvania worsened, despite the plentiful mining jobs.²⁴

Jones states that, in the coal mining regions, “the dependence of the anthracite regions on coal and towns along the paths of the canals on iron left them subject to significant recessions when the coal and iron markets experienced difficulty.”²⁵ The boom and bust narrative is familiar to the residents of Shamokin, says Rev. Lehrer, where coal mining started in the 1820s:

Some of the people in the church still talk about this. We have people who have been connected with the coal industry for a long time. And they’ll preface anything they talk about with “when coal was king...” ‘When coal was king, we have this, and this, and this, and things were booming.’

²⁰ Christopher F. Jones, “A Landscape of Energy Abundance: Anthracite Coal Canals and the Roots of American Fossil Fuel Dependence, 1820–1860.” *Environmental History* 15, no. 3 (July 1, 2010): 455.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 451.

²² *Ibid.*, 471–472.

²³ *Ibid.*, 471–472.

²⁴ Black and Ladson, 883.

²⁵ Jones, 471–472.

He explains that at its height in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Shamokin was a very different place than its current run-down, economically depressed state:

This was a city of over 50,000 people and all the churches were booming and the businesses were booming. There were four or five movie theaters and there were department stores downtown. Fridays and Saturdays were so crowded with people in the town you couldn't even walk on the sidewalks. Thomas Edison lived here. Edison electrified the first church in the country here. The first electrified city block was here in Shamokin. This was an industrial paradise for the people.

But even during the boom, he relays, the majority of wealth was not distributed to miners and diseases like the famous “black lung disease” were common. He says that tension between workers and mine owners was common and many miners left the big mines to “boot-leg mine” on property they often did not own to make a better wage. Though the coal is still plentiful in the ridges of Shamokin, the companies left the area in the 1950s and 1960s, when it became unprofitable to mine the ridgelines in Shamokin in comparison to other states like West Virginia, Rev. Lehrer chronicles. Companies blamed environmental regulations and labor laws for leaving the area, though the truth of these statements is dubious. It was more likely a problem of economies of scale and competition. Opinions on the mining legacy in the town and the church are mixed, as many site environmental effects, but bemoan the regulations that allegedly “killed” the coal industry that was the economic backbone of their town.

Many in the synod focused on the harm of coal strip-mining, stating that the effects are still visible in the synod. Mrs. Becky Loft, a member of a Lutheran church in Milton, near Lewisburg, says:

I have relatives that live in the mining country and it's amazing what it looks like. I'd like to think that the mining companies back then were cautious, but I don't see that.

Mr. Heinz explains that he feels that fracking is much more benign than coal mining:

Strip mining is horrible in comparison. [There is bad mining] contamination right here on Cook's Run. It's full of aluminum. And it's nasty. Two Mile Run where Green Camp is, there is a huge remediation going on there. There is a huge pond that catches the mine acid. And it goes through a mushroom mulch [filter]. And they use lime and stuff to

neutralize the acidity. The aluminum contamination kills all invertebrates and fish. And I imagine that you don't want to be drinking it.

Rev. Lehrer says that the waste from the mines still affects Shamokin:

[The hill there across from the church] is the waste from the Glenburn mine that goes for 8 miles along Shamokin. The people around [here] have subsidence insurance if they own the property because their house could be engulfed by a subsidence. I also serve a little country church along the next ridge and last year there was a 200 feet deep subsidence and it was right beside the road and they closed the road and I had to drive 17 miles around instead of the 4.5 miles that is normal. This stuff happens.

Rev. Lehrer says that the town's streams are still lifeless due to the mining and that the surrounding hills are come piles of mining waste that look stark in the winter and make the town dangerously dusty with coal ash.

Rev. Allen Kappel, of Lewisburg, cites the famous town of Centralia, next to Shamokin, that had to be permanently evacuated when a coal mine caught on fire:

There is a town a little further east of us: Have you ever heard of Centralia? It was on one of the major coal seams that caught fire underground and eventually the whole town had to move. The ground under them was burning up. For decades. I don't anticipate something on that level [with fracking]. But the history here has not been good.

Jones asserts, "The extraction of coal led to scarred landscapes of abandoned mines, deforested hills, and slag heaps. Mining produced large quantities of coal dust that settled on houses and fields and tainted drinking water supplies." He contends, "Over time, the anthracite regions became a sacrifice zone – an area whose environment was abandoned to serve the needs of distant consumers."²⁶ Some in the synod voice concern about whether their communities would be sacrificed as well for the sake of the gas boom that would fuel the nation's wealth.

²⁶ Jones, 471-472.



Fig. 5: Victorian Mansion in the Synod Built During the Oil Boom (Union County); Source: Lena Connor

Petrolia and the Oil Boom:

Though synod members did not mention the first oil boom in Pennsylvania often, because much of the oil drilling occurred in the counties west of the synod, many were aware of the thematic connection between fracking and the first wave of petroleum development, beginning shortly before the Civil War. It is also an important period of history to cover, because of its more direct parallels with gas drilling. Rev. Lehrer states that those who signed away their leases should have realized that the gas exploration was liable to be successful:

My grandfather was a farmer. He signed away mineral rights, knowing nothing would ever come of it. But they should have known here [when the natural gas companies came to frack]! Because Pennsylvania is an energy extraction state. Oil began here in Pennsylvania!

And, indeed, it did. Former train conductor, “Colonel” Edwin Drake, hit the world’s first well of petroleum in Titusville, PA in 1858. As Brian Black tells the tale, Jonathan Watson, a lumber

representative first capitalized on the discovery, quickly buying up land cheaply from the German and Scots-Irish farmers in the area before they knew the value of the land. He bought only portions of their land, by the creek where the first well was found, so the farmers thought little of it. Watson became the “region’s premier oil producer – drilling more than 2,000 wells by 1871,” recounts Black.²⁷ As will be discussed in the next chapter, this aspect of drilling has changed little, as companies bought up land swiftly and cheaply before landowners understood how valuable the shale gas was.

Black argues that the early oil boom set the stage for a type of careless ethic of land use that became “commonplace” in America with subsequent fossil fuel industries. “In the case of oil extraction, the lack of interest in limiting or regulating the search for crude oil became the defining ethic or value,” he argues. “Most important, the legal system offered little help to control development; in fact, the system of land law only furthered a laissez-faire approach to development and land-use.”²⁸ Among some of the ills were over-drilling, spills, land abandonment, subleasing, transient labor, and long-distance financial speculation as some of the ills of the early industry during the boom from 1860-1872.

Ida Tarbell, the famous muckraking journalist described the Oil Creek valley, known as Petrolia, as overrun by exploitation, speculation, and temporary development.

It is certain [...] the development could never have gone on at anything like the speed that it did except under the American system of free opportunity. Men did not wait to ask if into the Oil Region: they went. They did not ask how to put down a well: they quickly took the processes which other men had developed for other purposes and adapted them to their purpose. [...] What was true of production was true of refining, of transportation, of marketing. It was a triumph

²⁷ Brian Black. “‘A Triumph of Individualism’: The Rule of Capture and the Ethic of Extraction in Pennsylvania’s Oil Boom.” *Pennsylvania History* 66, no. 4 (October 1, 1999): 449.

²⁸ Black, 449.

of individualism. Its evils were the evils that come from giving men of all grades of character freedom of action. Taken as a whole, a truer exhibit of what must be expected of men working without other regulation than they voluntarily give themselves is not to be found in our industrial history.²⁹

And, apparently, voluntary self-governance during the oil boom was rare, as the free-for-all system rewarded shameless behavior with great wealth, as is true too often in the American system. The “fluidity” of petroleum, Black says, “caused many participants to lose any social or cultural restraint to development.”³⁰ With no ethical check on the “triumph of individualism,” speculation caused the price of oil to rise and fall dramatically.

The “freedom of action” Tarbell describes comes from an unregulated rule of capture at the time that allowed anyone who first found and extracted the oil the rights to the commodity, regardless of whether they owned the property rights. Vagel Keller argues that the lack of regulation on shale gas wells “highlight the fact that surface property owners still fall under the archaic ‘rule of capture’ doctrine.” Formalized by the state Supreme Court in 1899, it holds that “every landowner or his lessee may locate his wells wherever he pleases, regardless of the interests of others.” In the conclusion, the court asked and answered the following question: “What, then, can the neighbor do? Nothing; only go and do likewise.”³¹

Oil development greatly altered not only the landscape of the valley, but also the community. The farmers and lumbermen who lived in the valley before the boom knew oil existed there in the creeks, but did not know of its value. The oil transformed the area and was the primary “vehicle for the region’s prominence and economic progress,” says Black.³²

Boomtowns were hastily constructed and lacked the infrastructure that makes a sustainable

²⁹ Black, 450.

³⁰ Ibid., 450.

³¹ Vagel Keller. “‘Visit My Community’: The Need to Extend Environmental Justice to the Countryside.” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 79, no. 4 (2012): 402-403.

³² Ibid., 466.

community, as was true with timber, coal and industrial cities as well. Local residents attempted to establish regulation to control the craze that was taking over the area, but oil “became less a matter of regional development than of national exploitation,” Black argues, as outside companies, such as John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company, began to take over.³³ Petrolia supplied the entire world with oil in the 1860s, as the primary oil field. Black comments that the oil “way of life and business defined a portable industry that could be applied to a variety of resources in most locales. Motion made up the essence of this ethic, with community, production, and trade becoming transient entities.”³⁴

Many in the synod worry about this very ethic of transient extraction with the modern shale gas industry. Few are excited about the boom as the original oilmen were in Titusville, but many do see it as a vehicle to economic prosperity. Several synod members stated that the institutional and regulated nature of the large gas companies gives them comfort that speculation and environmental abuse will not be as common with this petroleum boom.



Fig. 6: Traditional German Lutheran Barn in Milton (Union County); Source: Lena Connor

³³ Black, 466.

³⁴ Ibid., 466.

Agriculture in the Synod:

No description of the synod's history would be complete without mention of the agricultural economy, which often acted [and continues to act] as both a foil and a complement to the industry. As Reverend Engel told me, in his region farming and mining existed side by side. Because industry was so transient in the area, residents considered themselves primarily farmers, but would work in the mines when the jobs were available:

There is a lot of farmland and folks have time to farm property up in the mountains. Yet it is not that clear that they are all farmers. Guys have worked in the industries, or some sons would work in the mines. You know, with the large families that they had, it wasn't clear that all the five children would be farmers again.

Though the towns are smaller now, they are still tight-knit farming communities with deep roots in the area.

Rev. Schumann said that in Liberty, a town with 200 people, families have been there for generations, primarily farming but supplementing the meager income with mining or lumber jobs. Rev. Schumann joked:

I always wanted to do a family tree in the congregation, but we would only be able to do two generations at a time because there would be so many lines if you did three. When a new family moved in, we would get excited, and joke, 'New genes for the gene pool!'

In the mountain towns, where the soil is less fertile than in the south of the synod, dairy farming is the norm, but is becoming increasingly hard to do. Milk prices have been flat for forty years:

We had farmers putting in these massive fish tanks to raise Tilapia, to have a supplemental income. Because the area of Liberty is too hilly to have real commercial crops. We grow a lot of feed and something for their own families. But yeah, it's a very different issue for those farmers and how they're going to make a living. I remember that milk would come out with a new PR campaign every year and some of our guys would just shake our heads and say, 'I wish they wouldn't spend so much on commercials and just give us a little more for the milk.'

His wife insightfully pointed out that farming has changed a lot in the past few decades. The dairy farms that did survive are no longer “postcard picture Martha Stewart farm” but are industrial operations with a lot of modern machinery:

But when you live and work in agriculture or in a community that's based on agriculture, or what comes from the land (lumber and so on), you realize that there are no pretty post card kinds of farms anymore. Nobody lives on a farm like that. It's a place filled with machinery and activity. It's a kind of industry. So when they see this kind of gas drilling development, for someone who lives with that kind of agriculture, it's just more complex machinery in their environment.

She explains that the rise of factory farms throughout the synod has fewer people squeamish about industrial development.

However, until the mid-twentieth century, small, non-mechanized, family-owned farms made up the majority of the synod and were the primary employment, especially in the south of the synod. The majority of German Lutherans that populated most of the synod churches were farmers. Mrs. Loft describes her experience growing up on a farm in the area in the 1960s and 1970s:

We grew corn; we grew vegetables; we raised our own cattle. We had three milk cows and drank our own milk. But we raised just enough to feed the livestock that we had. We were independent people. My mom would raise everything in the garden and can hundreds and hundreds of jars of fruit and vegetables every year. And that's what we lived on. We were self-sufficient. We did go the grocery store, but we didn't need to buy much. We churned our own butter; we even baked our own bread most of the time. My mom didn't work and she was the one who took care of the vegetable garden. We all pitched in and did what we had to do. My parents both grew up on farms. My mom's family and my dad's family. My dad was one of 16 children.

But her dad had to work a full-time job to pay the bills, as small-scale farming could not support a family by that time like it could in his parents' and grandparents' days. As the Green Revolution changed farming techniques across the world, Pennsylvania farming became industrialized and used less labor. Thus, employment in the synod became hard to come by, as is true of many agrarian communities in rural America. Mr. Hoffman still brags:

It's the next most fertile land to Lancaster County. My favorite saying out of high school was 'All future generations shall be born from farmers.'

This aphorism sums up the inherited mentality in the area, dating back to the first German immigrants who prized their farming lifestyle. But unfortunately, only those farmers who could afford to expand and modernize can support their families with the income from their farms. While they are doing quite well, Mr. Hoffmann worries about the next generation of farmers, as there are fewer young people interested in farming and fewer resources available for rural development.



Fig. 7: Lutheran Graveyard in Cogan Station (Lycoming County); Source: Lena Connor

Lutheran History in the Synod:

It was in this historical context of agriculture and industry that the synod's churches were shaped. Rev. Dr. Vogt explained that in history of Lutheranism in Pennsylvania is long and nuanced:

There are a lot of Lutheran churches in Pennsylvania, and a lot up in those mountains. Generally, they were there before the industries came. Before oil even. The original Lutherans came to farm or be laborers in small communities. And then the when [the coal

industry began] they would import large groups of people to work the mines, because they needed lots of labor.

He explained that the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its predecessor Lutheran bodies were made of congregants who were farm-based and not college-educated up until the mid-twentieth century, when Lutherans began to “get educated, move to the suburbs, and transition to a market economy.” He explains:

The domination was very ethnically homogeneous before this change. Where it was German, it was German. Where it was Norwegian, it was Norwegians. And Swedes, there were a few of them. But now intermarriage has changed that. In this synod, historically, it was mostly German. Some Swedes were imported to the oil and coal region up north. The Norwegian Lutherans were out in the Midwest.

The relationship between these Lutheran churches and industry and land use in central Pennsylvania is not often researched, but some early sociological texts on Pennsylvania Lutherans can give us some insight into how the churches might have viewed the industrial changes in their state.

Because Swedish Lutherans were in the minority, and often were similar in doctrine and form to German Lutheran churches.³⁵ I will primarily focus on German Lutheran communities in this paper. Of the thousands of German immigrants who came to the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most settled in Pennsylvania initially. Most came from the Lutheran, Reformed, Moravian, or Catholic traditions, though there were also German immigrants from persecuted Protestant “sects” such as the Anabaptists (the Mennonites and the Amish) and the Brethren (Dunkards or Schwenkfelders). The German Lutherans who came, also known as the “evangelicals,” were in the majority, though they associated with other groups of German immigrants and formed a distinct cultural identity in Pennsylvania and retaining the German language.³⁶

³⁵ Joseph Henry Dubbs. “The Founding of the German Churches of Pennsylvania.” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 17, no. 3 (January 1, 1893): 241-250.

³⁶ Dubbs, 241-248.

As Lutheran theologian George H. Anderson recounts, the first German Lutheran immigrants were often poverty-stricken in Europe and came first as indentured servants.³⁷ Poor evangelical Lutherans arrived after 1800 in great numbers, but because earlier arriving English, German Quaker, and Mennonite farmers took much of the cheap and fertile land in the southeast these newcomers they settled farther west, in central Pennsylvania, in the synod counties.³⁸

Writing in 1925, sociologist Heinrich H. Maurer set out to write a comprehensive sociological study of the Pennsylvania German Lutheran and his findings are telling. He was interested in seeing whether this group of Lutherans fit into Max Weber's theory about the "Protestant work ethic" and its affinity for capitalistic enterprise. His historical research led him to believe that unlike their Reformed, or Calvinist, counterparts, Lutherans were committed to an agrarian way of life and were suspicious of urbanization, speculation, and industrialization. As Maurer recounts, the president of the Pennsylvania German Society in his annual address in 1910, told the story of a Lutheran farmer behind a plow who, asked what he would do if knew that he would die tomorrow, answered that he would keep plowing. Maurer believed that this commitment to farming was a direct result not just of German culture, but also of his religion. "The essence of the Pennsylvania German personality is German Lutheranism."³⁹

The pietism of early German Lutheran pastors, such as Rev. Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, who founded the first Lutheran body in Pennsylvania and in the whole of North America in 1742, gave Lutheran theology a personal and practical piety that suited the agrarian communities of Pennsylvania and informed their practices. The first Pennsylvania Lutherans

³⁷ George H. Anderson. "Alms and Advocacy: Lutheran Ministry with the Poor." *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 5, no. 5 (May 2005),1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁹ Heinrich H. Maurer. "Studies in the Sociology of Religion II. Religion and American Sectionalism. The Pennsylvania German." *American Journal of Sociology* 30, no. 4 (January 1, 1925): 412.

were “strong in the Word” and very learned, but “worldly, wise and genteel,” remarks Maurer.⁴⁰ Unlike Calvinist Puritans, they believed that Scripture grounded them not in God’s law but in the gospel of communitarian love and interdependence. As opposed to the Calvinist emphasis on reason and religious order, the Lutherans were focused on traditionalism, faith, and service to the common good.⁴¹

Maurer states that Lutherans believed that godly morality was integrally tied to agrarian social structures: “The function of the soil and of a natural-economy and manorial civilization in the psychic economy of this Lutheran Christianity [...] becomes clearly evident in the Lutheran Utopia of this age: a sort of fantastic description of the promised land of the Lutheran pilgrim.”⁴² They believed the labor-rhythm on a farm from sunrise to sunset, with a biblical Sabbath on Sundays, was sacred, as was the tight and egalitarian community of with its emphasis on “collective usufruct instead of individual assignment of capitol and return.”⁴³ Things to be feared were “the English,” cash nexus, enterprise, Calvinism, “the siren call of a new herd,” radical and experimental sects, and anti-traditionalism. They fought hard to retain the German heritage, German language, and Lutheran roots, because “if we do not remain Lutherans, we will not remain farmers, and we are nothing if not farmers,” was the sentiment at the time.⁴⁴

As expressed in one Lutheran pamphlet to Pennsylvania churches, they worried that if their children were Anglicized, the children would squander the fruit of the parents’ toil on the farm, become lazy and loose and ruin the quality of the farm. “For the secular order which was not of the family farm, the guild-shop or the parish, they had a deep distrust; for the state,

⁴⁰ Maurer, 412.

⁴¹ Ibid., 412-413.

⁴² Ibid., 413.

⁴³ Ibid., 426.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 425.

obedience to law but alert suspicion of encroachment," remarks Maurer.⁴⁵ In contrast to Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and other reformed denominations, "This class [of Lutherans] was hostile to 'big business,' to the city and city ways; averse to speculative enterprise and economics, but equally afraid of radical experiments."⁴⁶

Lutheranism and Industry:

According to Maurer, Lutheran farmers were initially very suspicious of the new industries such as coal, timber, and oil and the traditional communities stayed out of their way, preferring their old ways. New groups of Lutheran immigrants, such as the Swedish Lutherans, might have worked in the mines, but Lutherans, with a few exceptions, were not at the forefront of the capitalist charge for extractive industry. As I walked through Williamsport, the lumber boomtown, I noted that the early lumber barons donated money to Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches, not Lutheran churches.

For the Protestant sects that tended to be most enthusiastic about the industrial revolution were those from a Calvinist tradition of predestination of the elect that often manifested itself in wealth and success. There is perhaps no better example of this prosperity gospel philosophy than the writings of Presbyterian minister, Rev. Samuel John Mills Eaton, who wrote one of the first histories of Pennsylvania's oil boom in 1866. In this book, he describes the nineteenth century with its industrial booms as the "grand climacteric" of the world's history. "[Petroleum] has been evidently been a product of earth the beginning. It has been one of God's great gifts to his creatures, designed for their happiness; but kept locked up in his secret laboratory, and developed only in accordance with their necessities." Eaton continues, "The Almighty God appears to be opening his great treasure house to provide for the grand and important changes, that in his wise and inscrutable Providence, he is working among

⁴⁵ Maurer., 421.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 428.

us here."⁴⁷ He believes that the petroleum found in Pennsylvania was one of God's greatest blessings to mankind and without a doubt "to aid in the solution of the mighty problem of the nation's destiny."⁴⁸

Rev. Eaton had few worries, as the Lutherans did, about the morality of the resulting capitalist economy. In his book, he tells the story of the oil boom in Petrolia with nothing but admiration, stating that the petroleum trade is "singular and unparalleled in the world's history" and has "sprung in almost mature strength and vigor from the earth's bosom." He says that petroleum has "leaped at once into the arena of the world's traffic, and is now the peer, if not superior, of all other branches of trade."⁴⁹

Many people have become suddenly and immensely wealthy, who were formerly in very straightened circumstances. Plain farmers have become millionaires; men whose incomes were half a dollar per day a few years ago now have an income of five thousand per day. Still in very few instances has this sudden wealthy appeared to have an injurious influence upon its possessor. In a very few cases it has dazzled, and blinded, and blighted all the better feelings of the heart, but generally it has not, apparently at least, led to dissipation, vice, and ruin. On the contrary, in very many noble instances it has had a happy effect in inducing to benevolent works, to acts of kindness, and to labors of love and sympathy."⁵⁰

It is sentiments like these – Weberian feasts of capitalist fervor couched in Christian rhetoric – that make many observers believe that Christianity is decidedly pro-industrial development.

⁴⁷ Samuel John Mills Eaton. *Petroleum: a History of the Oil Region of Venango County, Pennsylvania: Its Resources, Mode of Development, and Value: Embracing a Discussion of Ancient Oil Operations*. J. P. Skelly, 1866, 1.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 285-286.

But other Christians in the same time period came to quite different conclusions about the boom. William Wright, another early historian of the Pennsylvania oil boom wrote in 1865 that many religious leaders were worried about the ethics of the communities that sprung up around extractive industries. They saw that in the boomtowns, the commodity of oil became a powerful idol. Wright expresses it thus: "The fact is, in Petrolia, the church universally believed in is an engine house, with a derrick for its tower, a well for its Bible, and a two-inch tube for its preacher, with mouth rotund, 'bringing forth things new and old,' in the shape of two hundred barrels per day of crude oil. In the principle business-centres, regular societies have been instituted; but that practical Christianity which leads men not only to love and fear God, but love mercy and hate covetousness, is not in flourishing condition."⁵¹

During the first three or four years of the "oil excitement," Wright chronicles, very little respect was shown for the Sabbath and few attempts were made to establish Christian churches or worship centers. Because of the competition between oilmen, "the people pumped, and barreled, and drove, and shipped petroleum on Sunday as well as Saturday."⁵² However, he said, perhaps because of the conscientiousness of larger companies or the determination of the oilmen, or the influence of the surrounding churches, the areas gradually built churches and observed the Sabbath. For "man lives not by oil alone, however, any more than by bread," Wright remarks in biblical tones.⁵³ But the oilmen had difficulty achieving real piety and were more "disposed to purchase tickets to the Celestial City for their friends and relatives that to get aboard of the cars and ride themselves." Wright argued that the "insane desire of oil is demoralizing," leading to every kind of "misrepresentation and cheating."⁵⁴ "Oil-smellers" or

⁵¹William Wright. *The Oil Regions of Pennsylvania*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1865, 57.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

“diviners” were more respected for mystical powers for finding oil than pastors were for their ability to find eternal salvation.⁵⁵

Maurer argues that it was this sinful temptation that German Lutherans feared with the transition to an industrialized economy. With the death of “village socialism” and the agrarian way, and the coming of “liquid economics, of the investor, the inventor, and the enterpriser,” much of the Lutheran way was in danger of being lost. The “idea of relationship” and the “group-personalism” of the early Lutheran communities were under attack.⁵⁶ But then again, Maurer states, there were aspects of the Lutheran agrarian work ethic that suited the new capitalist economy well: “The traditional economic mores of the Lutheran creed did not produce as many enterprisers as Calvinism did, but they served American industry by keeping a valuable labor motor intact; they saved the social estate of much technical efficiency from dissipation.”⁵⁷ However, he argues that the Lutherans blended the stewardship of resources with an “ideological socialism,” tempering the more extreme effects of capitalism.⁵⁸

It must be said that there were some prominent exceptions to this generalization of Lutherans. For example, during the race to find a way to smelt iron using anthracite coal rather than bituminous coal, it was a Lutheran pastor who found the solution that enabled the industrial revolution in Pennsylvania. “The application of the hot-blast to anthracite coal in American furnaces was successfully experimented with by an enterprising American citizen, the Rev. Dr. Frederick W. Geissenhainer, a Lutheran clergyman of New York City,” relates historian James H. Swank.⁵⁹ The patent was granted to him in 1833 and was first used to make

⁵⁵ Wright., 61.

⁵⁶ Maurer, 435.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 438.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 438.

⁵⁹ James H. Swank. *History of the Manufacture of Iron in All Ages*. Ayer Publishing, 1965, 354.

pig iron in Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania. Rev. Dr. Geissenhainer pioneered in the coal and iron industry in Pennsylvania for decades, as “a man of great enterprise.”⁶⁰

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, when the entire landscape of Pennsylvania had been altered, German Lutherans began to naturally mix with the new industries to a greater degree, as miners, entrepreneurs, and working class laborers. Rev. Lehrer says that in Shamokin, the vocation of local Lutherans varied:

Well, some Lutherans owned the water company so they made sure that was protected and that Shamokin had clean water. And the different ethnic groups that I was talking about, the working class would have been Lutheran. So coal miners, the people who went into the mines and supported the mining industry in other ways, would have been Lutheran. Some of the older members of the church, though they are dying off now, will say, ‘Well my dad never went into the mines, but he made timber to support the mine ceiling and walls. So I worked with timber all my life.’

Rev. Lehrer recalls Lutherans did some of the bootleg mining. In the smaller church he pastors in the valley, its parishioners have some historical reluctance to accept government regulations.

He says that the Lutherans in his church who are loyal to coal usually did well in the industry:

We had a family here in the Shamokin Lutheran Church who made a lot of money in mining. They owned a breaker. The coal miners would bring coal to them and they would separate out the different sizes and they would clean it. And then they sell the different size coal that people need. That family did really well in mining and so they have a different perspective of mining.

But he also points out that many of the Lutherans in the Shamokin church were from Polish heritage; it was not as heavily German Lutheran as some of the surrounding churches in the farming areas.

Concluding Thoughts:

What can we learn from this narrative of industrial change in Pennsylvania and how can it be an asset to the Upper Susquehanna Synod as they discuss the new gas industries in their counties? First of all, churches can use history – and often do – to inform their faith. Stories of

⁶⁰ Swank, 356.

industry can act as parables, similar to scripture, that contain moral lessons and reveal truths about the nature of humans, God, and Creation. Rev. Jim Erikson, a leader of the synod, says that in his experience with Lutherans in the area, congregants tend to identify more a language of “relationships, stories and proverbs,” as they come from an oral culture.

Hence, these stories of old industrial booms and their consequences do have a potent impact on many of the synod members. Synod members, who have long lineages in the area, have this historical context in the back of their mind as they discuss fracking, even if they do not all articulate the connections between the history and the current situation. Thus, the context either overtly or subliminally shapes the current discourse on the shale gas industry. Black and Ladson argue that this memory is present throughout Pennsylvania. He says that the “lessons embodied in the energy landscape of Pennsylvania are not altogether lost on residents,” as gas industry leaders say that their biggest challenge with public relations about fracking “is convincing people in Pennsylvania that [gas is] not coal.”⁶¹ Black and Ladson assert that just as billions of dollars worth of revenue from oil and coal did not leave boomtowns rich for long, “now much of the gas is leaving Pennsylvania” and profiting companies and financiers more than local residents.⁶²

Rev. Engel says that the history of rural people getting the short end of the stick in these industries affects his congregants’ perceptions of fracking:

Folks here in these churches don't have a lot of trust in big industry. They got cheated, or saw the short end of the straw, with the timber industry, where big guys made big money and where others barely got by. And it's all on the back of the people and the end you are left with whatever they leave you. So there is very much that sentiment in this neck of the woods. That you're just going to be taken advantage of with whomever you deal with. Whether it's the company, or the government, or the unions – they will all take your money and no one offers anything. That's some of the mindset here. That's why here in the 1950s they didn't even want to have public water here. Because it was just going to be another company that was going to rake them over the coals. They people here think

⁶¹ Black and Ladson, 884.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 887.

that the minute they deal with industry, government, whatever, they are going to get raked over.

Rev. Lehrer comments that in Shamokin, there is little direct anger at the industry, but there is a depression that comes from living in a bust town:

There is also a feeling that no one wants to be here. They feel like the area is devastated and they wonder why anyone would ever come here again. The kids in catechism will talk about 'I'm getting out of here and I'm never coming back. This place is ugly and there is nothing here to do and there will never be any jobs and I'm getting out of here!' Some of the people here are unhappy in their day-to-day life. There's some depression here.

There are a few people in the church who love the town and keep up their houses and see hope for renewal, Rev. Lehrer says, but on the whole the town suffers from poverty and a downtrodden atmosphere.

Keller asserts that this history in Pennsylvania should be viewed for the lens of environmental justice, which is not usually applied to rural areas. The environmental justice focus on urban, communities of color in Pennsylvania cities is certainly warranted, but “the paradigm for understanding the socioeconomic component of environmental inequality now needs to expand to account for an imbalance between the power of major corporations and that of small towns and rural communities to influence public opinion and political action not seen in this country since the Gilded Age.”⁶³ Keller argues that the new shale gas boom gives us an opportunity to reexamine how we view rural America in relation to industry.

Keller references Seamus McGraw's recent book on fracking in Pennsylvania entitled *The End of Country: Dispatches from the Frack Zone*, with its sympathetic analysis of the plight of farmers and low-income people in the rural parts of the state, many of whom have no choice but to accept the gas industry income. Keller says, “We might ask ourselves whether historical investigation of government policies on energy, agriculture, and the environment that put

⁶³Keller, 401-403.

people in such situations fits within the framework of environmental justice.”⁶⁴ Cindy Schumann, the wife of Rev. Tom Schumann, says that her experience living in the small town of Liberty demonstrated to her that the rural people there often feel that they are of little value to the industry or to society as a whole:

In rural areas, the group mindset is that there are so few of us, we're so far from the center that we don't matter in the big picture. And I think that's very common. I don't think that many people would articulate that verbally, but as someone who became a part of the community but wasn't from around here, I can see that. It's Appalachian culture. We're still part of that stretch of the country.

The task for the church, argued Rev. Dr. Vogt, is to make sure that its rural congregants and others in the area feel that they are of deep value to God and to the community and are worthy of protection from any potential harm from fracking, emphasizing that the church must work to make sure the mistakes of the past are not repeated.

Some in the synod said that there are many blessings that the church can express thanks for, pointing to the differences in the public attitude about ecological regulation and stating that current laws on fracking are much stronger than past industry codes of ethics. Black and Ladson observe that in comparison to the “free-for-all” of the oil boom, for example, with shale gas drilling, “current laws require drillers to acquire permits, submit plans, post bonds, establish setbacks between gas wells and water sources, case wells through the groundwater table, notify nearby landowners, and comply with local zoning.”⁶⁵ Rev. Lehrer commented that though fracking is inevitable in the area and that the church has little power to stop it completely, it can be a voice for protecting local people and ecosystems, and improving and maintaining strong regulation on industry, and in encouraging gas companies to make ethical and caring decisions. Additionally, I think, the church has a unique social structure that can

⁶⁴Keller, 403.

⁶⁵ Black and Ladson, 888.

allow the historical narratives about industry and agriculture to remain alive and influential in the debates about fracking.

Now that I have examined the historical context for this Lutheran synod and its relationship to Pennsylvania land use, I will jump forward in time to the details of the current shale gas boom and to the synod members' reaction to the present industry. In the next chapter, I explore the technicalities of fracking and how the Lutheran individuals in the synod are responding to the change to their communities.

Chapter II: Fracking and the Marcellus Shale Gas Boom

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

- Romans 8:22-23

Fracking in the Synod:

As you can see in the map above, natural gas extraction from “unconventional wells” – or wells that tap shale resources through hydraulic fracturing – is now widespread across Pennsylvania. The wells cover a diagonal stretch of land from the southwestern corner of the state near Pittsburgh to the northeastern corner near Dimock, the town featured in the now-famous documentary about fracking entitled “Gasland.” Of the ten counties in the synod, three of the counties contain new wells and the other seven counties contain support industries for the gas initiatives. When I interviewed Justin Heinz, a member of a Lutheran church in the small town of Avis, between Jersey Shore and Lock Haven (in Clinton County), and a head contractor for gas well construction, he told me that the Marcellus Shale that contains the natural gas lies under the northern half of the synod; the bend in the Susquehanna River near Williamsport acts as a boundary.

Many that I interviewed noted that the industry had transformed the entire region in a very short amount of time. Companies began to buy mining rights seven or eight years ago, and began to drill about five years ago. As Rev. Allen Kappel, a pastor in Lewisburg (in Union County), says, the boom is a conundrum for many in the region:

This however has been, as some of our folks mentioned at the Synod Assembly, a real mixed blessing. There are people up in the northern part of [the Synod] that have had family farms for generations, just a couple of acres that barely help them break even. And now all these gas companies are coming in and offering all this money for leasing and drilling rights and its nice to have some [income] after generations of hard-scrabble farming. And it sounds nice, because [the companies] only tell you what they want you to know. And it might not work out in the long run in the way you hope.

The industry in the north has also given the economy in the southern half of the synod a boost as well. Commerce has increased for contractors, retailers, water distribution companies, truck companies, and hotels that house workers. Many that I spoke to referenced these economic benefits, but also voiced concern about the social and environmental risks of the industry and its potential effect on their homeland.

One elderly gentleman named Frank Hiland, also member of the Lutheran church in Avis, is glad that the industry have come into the region:

It's a good idea. I had two grandsons that had bad jobs when they got out of school. And now [fracking has] come along. And now one of them is number one electrician for the company.

But Cindy Schumann and her husband, Rev. Tom Schumann, of Lewisburg, worry about the dangers of the industry. The more she reads about fracking in the media, the more anxious Mrs. Schumann gets that they sold the mineral rights to the property they own in the township of Liberty (in Lycoming County):

I don't want them fracking on our ground at all. Not that that would prevent the surrounding operations from affecting us. But I'm very decisive and stubborn. I have no problem saying, 'No!' and meaning it.

Sam Bauer, who works in the synod office and for the synod's ten-week summer camp for children, expresses that he was on the fence on the issue, and is still trying to weigh the pros and cons:

It seems to me that this all came on pretty quick. All of the sudden, [the companies] were like, 'Oh wow! We have this [potential gas source], we can [pump it!].' And then it was in the national media. I don't know if anyone [around here] was really prepared. So it's a new reality that we have to deal with.

Many members of the synod, particularly in congregations north of Williamsport, leased their land to the companies without much thought. Rev. Bernhard Engel, who pastors many churches in the sparsely populated area from Williamsport to the northern state line in Lycoming County and Tioga County, (where fracking is most concentrated), says that the old

farmers in his churches are very aware that there are lots of minerals and resources in their mountains; they have been leasing their mineral rights to various companies for decades. Most of the time nothing came of the leases, he recounts:

With past experience, they would not believe that they would be part of an economic boom. That is something that has never happened in their lifetime. The industry said there would be opportunity for industry and growth in the area, but they didn't believe in that so much. Most saw it as an opportunity to take a bit of money to get by.

Though some congregants have participated in small coal mining endeavors, the mining economies of their parents and grandparents, described in the Chapter 1, are long gone. Before fracking came, many thought the lucrative days of Pennsylvania extraction were behind them. Rev. Schumann explains that he signed without thinking anything of it, as mineral companies would come by every decade to lease land in Liberty, but would inevitably find out extraction was not feasible:

So farmers just got used to saying 'Where do I sign?' And they'd sign, and not even think about it. And I truly didn't think it was going to go very far. It was ridiculous what they were willing to offer [our family] to just look around and find out it wasn't feasible, [I thought at the time].

Many signed on with the gas companies at \$30 an acre, long before the boom hit national news. At that time, no one knew what “fracking” was and the companies never revealed to the property owners that they were leasing for natural gas or planning to use a new, unconventional method, says Mrs. Schumann.

The companies moved quickly because they knew that once the boom hit, the price per acre would rise dramatically. Currently, companies pay new leasers up to \$4,000 per acre and high royalty fees. Rev. Engel says that four years ago, his primary church—located north of Williamsport in the mountains (pictured on the title page) was approached by the gas companies about leasing the church land, including the cemetery:

And you know, we had some good debates in the church about what it means. And at that point, it was \$2,500 per acre. And you know, interesting enough those who got cheated at

\$30 an acre were bitter and said 'You might as well wait a while until the prices double again.'

The church voted to lease it in 2008, unaware of many of the environmental and health concerns of the industry, which were not widely discussed at that time. As we walked around the church grounds, overlooking the wooded mountains, I asked him if there were well pads nearby. He answered:

Yes, on this mountain there [by the church]. There are dozens around us. You can see the pipelines over the hills now. You can see the lights [and flares] as soon as it gets dark. We are in the middle of it. So it is as close as you can get. Much happens in the secrecy of the mountains and it is just my mountain people who are up there who know about it. They see it and they see the destruction that's going on and the changes. But for us normal folks, it is basically just the heavy truck traffic that is noticeable.

windmills He says that members in his churches are still baffled by industry, with so many questions left unanswered and much conflicting information coming from the media, the government, and the company representatives.



Fig. 8: Shale Gas Wells and Windmills Side by Side in Liberty (Tioga County); Source: Lena Connor

Fracking on a National Scale:

The synod members are not alone in their confusion about the new industry, as fracking continues to befuddle even the experts. Once touted as the cleanest of fossil fuels and thought of as a potential solution to climate change, natural-gas extraction was supported by some environmentalists for decades, including large nonprofits like the Sierra Club. Chesapeake Energy, the same company that leased Rev. Engel's cemetery land, donated millions of dollars to The Sierra Club's "Beyond Coal" campaign. Natural gas proponents, President Obama among them, have praised the new shale gas as a supply of cheap, green energy that is essential for American economic growth and energy independence. "With five major shale 'plays' concentrated in eight states, and more under development, America has been transformed from a net importer of natural gas into a potential exporter," says environmental journalist Edward Humes.⁶⁶ Some geologists say that the shale gas will supply us with energy for 100 years, while others predict as few as 11 years. Mr. Heinz is confident he will have work for decades and that the drilling will not until after he is retired:

They have found gas and oil in the [Marcellus layer] and also in the [layers beneath it], including wet gas. There are three types of gas: natural gas, oil, and then there's wet gas, which they call cracker. It makes more money than the gas and the oil. There is a cracker plant going into Johnstown, PA, for plastics.

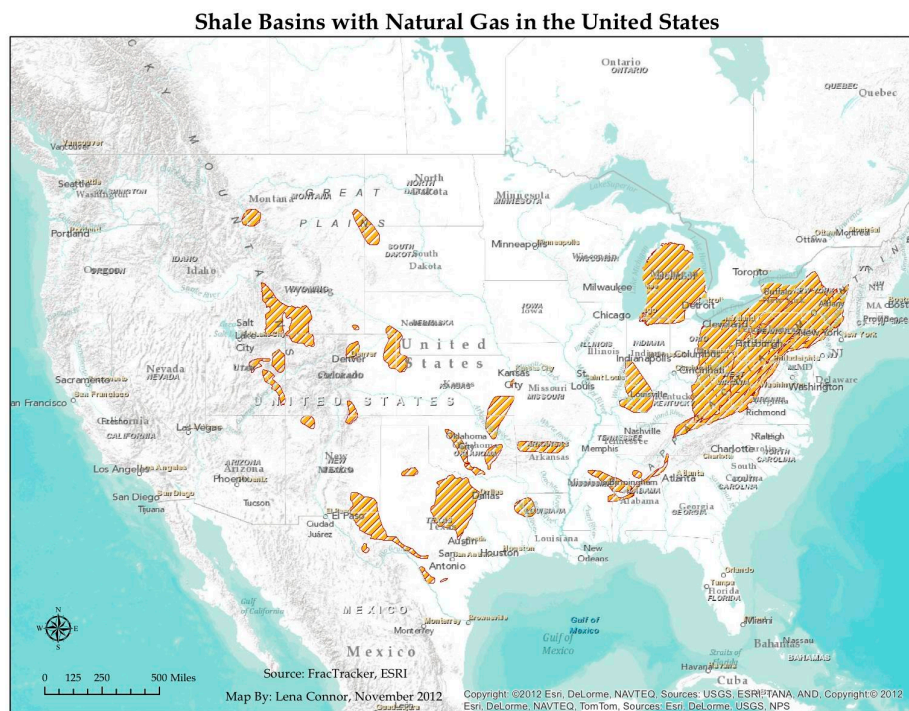
He refers to the layers of petroleum that are predicted to be under the shale, which will be an added reserve once the gas is exhausted.

With conventional gas extraction reaching its peak in the 1970s, unconventional gas from shale layers now makes up over 20 percent of U.S. gas supply, compared to 1 percent in 2000.⁶⁷ "The overall increase in natural gas extraction is being driven in large part by the increase in consumption, which rose 19 [percent] between 1990 and 2009," says journalist Bob

⁶⁶ Edward Humes. "Fractured Lives." *Sierra* 97, no. 4 (August 2012): 52.

⁶⁷ Richard A. Kerr. "Natural Gas From Shale Bursts Onto the Scene." *Science* 328, no. 5986 (June 25, 2010): 1625.

Weinhold.⁶⁸ ExxonMobil predicts that natural gas will be the “fastest-growing major fuel to 2040,” with demand rising by over 60 percent.” Much of this growth will come from electric utilities and other consumers shifting away from coal in order to reduce CO2 emissions. By 2025, natural gas – which emits up to 60 percent less CO2 emissions than coal when used for electricity generation – will have overtaken coal as the second most popular fuel, after oil,” Weinhold cites⁶⁹ The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that coal-fired plants are expected to slip to 10 percent of total new capacity in the U.S. in 2013, while natural gas is expected to surge to 82 percent of new capacity in 2013, up from 42 percent last year.⁷⁰ But to supply America with plentiful gas, this controversial method of accessing the shale gas is necessary; many environmentalists now are deeply concerned about the chemical effects of the new extraction technique and argue that shale gas extraction is just as climate change inducing as the fossil fuels it appears to be replacing.



Map 2: Shale Basins with Natural Gas in the United States; Source: Lena Connor

⁶⁸ Bob Weinhold. “The Future of Fracking.” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 120, no. 7 (July 2012): A275.

⁶⁹ “Natural Gas.” *ExxonMobil: Energy and Technology*, n.d.

http://www.exxonmobil.com/Corporate/energy_outlook_sup_gas.aspx, 1.

⁷⁰ Rebecca Smith. “Turning Away From Coal.” *Wall Street Journal*, n.d. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB20001424052748703579804575441683910246338.html>, 1.

Cracking the Shale:

The Marcellus Shale, the largest source of shale gas in the United States, covers an area of 240,000 km² (95,000 mi²), and underlies a large portion of Pennsylvania and parts of New York, Ohio, and Maryland. Formed during the Devonian age, the Marcellus belongs to a group of black, organic-rich shales that are composed of sedimentary deposits.⁷¹ It lies one to two miles below the surface of the earth. Natural gas is formed and trapped in the rock as the organic materials in the layer degrade anaerobically.⁷² As Kerr explains, conventional deposits of gas and oil are “actually the final resting places of far-traveled hydrocarbons that were generated in deeper ‘source beds’ of organic-rich rock” and are found nearer to the surface, trapped beneath impermeable layers and waiting to spurt out. “By contrast, shale gas – a so-called unconventional resource – never left its birthplace. It’s still in the source bed whose organic matter gave rise to the gas.” Kerr continues that because “the pores in the fine-grained shale are not well connected, the rock is too impermeable to let the gas go. Drill into it – as drillers occasionally did – and you get barely a fizzle,” he concludes.⁷³

So for decades, the shale gas was untouched by gas companies. But recently, engineers developed a way to fracture the shale to release the gas (referred to in the industry as “fracking” or “fracing”). Fluid is injected at extremely high pressures to force cracks in the shale layer and make pathways for the gas to travel up the well. “Fracturing fluid is typically 90.6 [percent] water, 9 [percent] proppant (often sand) used to keep the fractures open, and 0.4 [percent] chemicals added for such purposes as reducing friction and protecting equipment from corrosion,” says Trevor Smith of the Gas Technology Institute.⁷⁴

⁷¹ David M. Kargbo, Ron G. Wilhelm, and David J. Campbell. “Natural Gas Plays in the Marcellus Shale: Challenges and Potential Opportunities.” *Environmental Science & Technology* 44, no. 15 (2010): 5679.

⁷² Kerr, 1624.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1624.

⁷⁴ Trevor Smith. “Environmental Considerations of Shale Gas Development.” *Chemical Engineering Progress* 108, no. 8 (August 2012): 57.

The proppant is the most controversial part of the mixture. According to David M. Kargbo, et al., "Gels are added to increase the hydrofracture fluid viscosity and reduce fluid loss from the fracture. Additional additives may include the following: acids to remove drilling mud near the wellbore, biocides to prevent microbial growth that produce gases (e.g., H₂S) that may contaminate the methane gas (CH₄), scale inhibitors to control the precipitation of carbonates and sulfates, and surfactants to increase the recovery of injected fluid into the well by reducing the interfacial tension between the fluid and formation materials."⁷⁵ It is these chemicals that worry environmentalists, as their effect on organisms would be dire if they were allowed to enter into water systems. Hence, fracking has become a dreaded word in environmental circles over the past few years.

"Fracking and drilling are not the same thing," said University of Houston engineering professor Michael Economides, who consults for drillers on fracturing. "We drill wells. Then we fracture."⁷⁶ To technical experts, "fracking" only entails the injection of high-pressured fluid into a well to crack the shale, and none of the other steps of the drilling process. But as Michael Soraghan of the New York Times observes, to outsiders and the media, "fracking" and drilling are the same thing, because the technology has made the shale gas boom possible. In "common parlance," says Humes, the term encompasses the leasing of land; the building of the well-pads; the construction of containment pits for fracking fluid; the drilling of wells 6,000-7,000 feet deep; the drilling of the horizontal shafts for breadth of access; the installation of concrete casing; the trucking or piping of the fracking chemicals; the fracturing itself using water, sand, and toxic

⁷⁵ Kargbo, et al., 5680-5681.

⁷⁶ Mike Soraghan. "Baffled About Fracking? You're Not Alone." *The New York Times*, May 13, 2011, sec. Business Day / Energy & Environment. <http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2011/05/13/greenwire-baffled-about-fracking-youre-not-alone-44383.html>, 1.

fracturing chemicals; and the capturing and disposal of the harmful flow-back fluid; and the trucking and piping of methane gas away for consumption.⁷⁷

Both supporters and critics of fracking use the confusion to talk past each other when discussing the industry, explains Soraghan. Industry representatives such as Rex Tillerson, CEO of ExxonMobil, says “fracking” means only the isolated step in the process, noting in congressional testimony: “There have been over a million wells hydraulically fractured in the history of the industry, and there is not one, *not one*, reported case of a freshwater aquifer having ever been contaminated from hydraulic fracturing.”⁷⁸ In other words, the energy companies exonerate themselves because of a linguistic trick, says Soraghan: “That is because the companies are saying, specifically, that no one has ever proven that hydraulic fracturing fluid rises up a mile or so from the production zone, through layers of rock, to pollute drinking water aquifers. They rarely, if ever, clarify that regulators have repeatedly linked water contamination and other environmental problems to other aspects of drilling.”⁷⁹ “The hot-button issue is fracking,” comments Robert Jackson, the Duke professor who authored the most comprehensive independent study of fracking. But, he says, “I believe it's more about the drilling than the fracking.”⁸⁰ However, because synod members refer to the entire drilling process as “fracking,” in this report I will do likewise.

The whole drilling process includes many steps and can often be done by separate companies at separate times, leading to a diffusion of responsibility and often a lack of communication. I interviewed Ted Lowe, a member of a synod church in Lewisburg and a former field operator on the gas wells, and he told me that it is a complex process for each well pad:

⁷⁷ Humes, 55.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁹ Soraghan, 1.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 1.

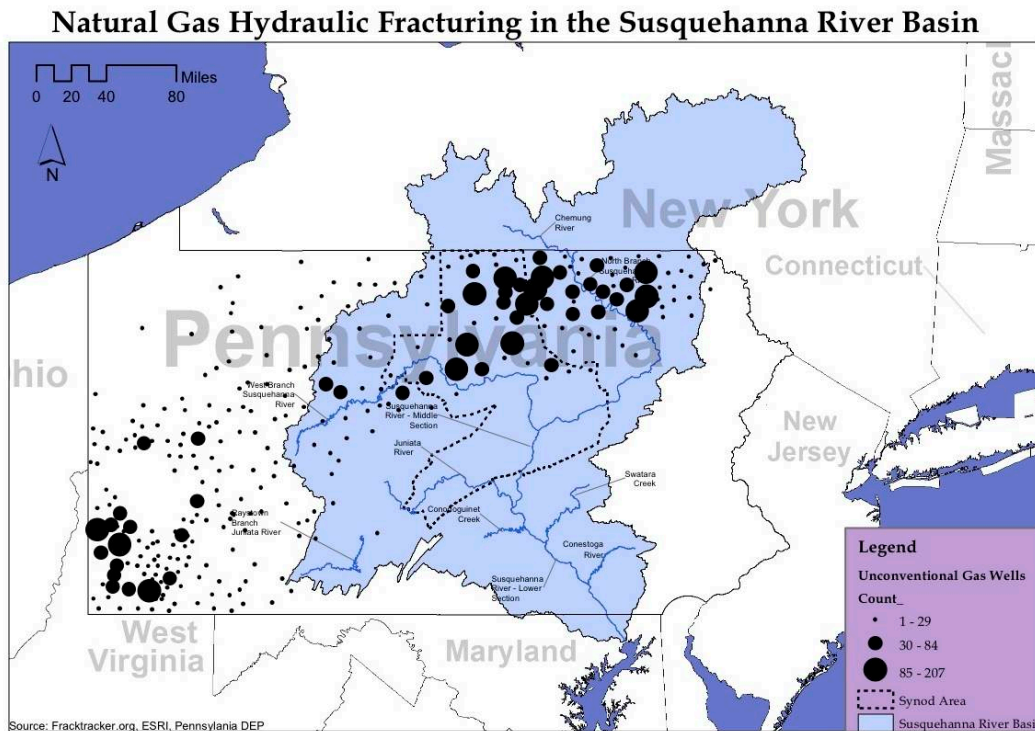
We do it in what we call stages. A well can be 15-30 stages. It actually is about a two-week process. Sometimes they even have multiple wells on each pad. If they do that, then [workers] could be there for a couple of months.

He worked on the stage of drilling before the fracking process, using explosives to prepare the well for hydraulic fracturing:

The fracking process is done by a different crew. We make it possible for them to do their job by preparing the well. We go in and we isolate the zone. What it actually does is explode a small hole in the casing and the rock, which allows the frack fluid [to do the rest of the job] by putting the pressure on it for a couple of hour until it actually fractures the rock.

When the process is finished, the well pad is a network of up to six wells, located on a two to six acre plot of clear-cut land and containing a holding pond for the used fracking effluents.

Relying on hundreds of trucks to haul equipment and water to and from the site, a shale gas well is “and industrial and highly visible process,” though not as noticeable as strip-mining for coal or off-shore oil drilling, says Smith.⁸¹



Map 3: Natural Gas Hydraulic Fracturing in the Susquehanna River Basin; Source: Lena Connor

⁸¹ Smith, 53.

Concerns about Fracking:

National concerns around fracking revolve around the use of carcinogenic and toxic chemicals in the fracking cocktail that have the potential to cause frightful health effects in both local people and ecosystems. According to an April 2011 report by the Minority Staff of the House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce, often used in fracking are "29 chemicals that are (1) known or possible human carcinogens, (2) regulated under Safe Drinking Water Act for their risks to human health, or (3) listed as hazardous pollutants under the Clean Air Act."⁸² Such chemicals can enter water sources through truck spills, casing failures in the wells during the fracturing process, leaks in the holding ponds, or during injection of the frack-water into underground toxic waste repositories.

Rev. Adler expressed her concerns to me during our conversation, saying the research she has done on the categories of chemicals known to be used in the drilling process make her nervous for the long-term health of her watershed:

These chemicals will stay in the water forever. You're dealing with chemicals that are not natural, they're human-made, they're not carbon-based. So, the earth can't break them down easily. Earth cycles can't match the rate at which human beings are putting these chemicals in the water. And there is huge unknowns here – they're putting chemicals together that have never been mixed before. So they don't even know what chemical reactions are going on in the water [that they are pumping into the earth]. Each company uses different combinations, or cocktails, of chemicals. And they are trade secrets, [so the public can't know what chemicals are being used].

Rev. Adler says that she is worried that casing failures will eventually cause leaks into aquifers, citing industry statistics that six percent of all casings fail routinely. Anytime you have a crack in the casing, water is going to take the path of least resistance, she argues. Christiana Peppard, Professor of Theology and Science at Fordham University, also worries about the inherent safety of the practice. Gas interests, she states, promise that concrete walls and impermeable

⁸² Christiana Z. Peppard. "Invasive Procedures." *Huffington Post*, May 19, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christiana-z-peppard/obama-hydraulic-fracturing-_b_1528808.html?view=print&comm_ref=false., 1.

layers of rock between injection sites and aquifers will prevent any contamination. “But fresh water supply is a complex, dynamic reality at the intersection of hydrology and geology that cannot be assumed to follow humans’ rules,” Peppard argues.⁸³ Mrs. Schumann also voiced that she was skeptical:

Well, it doesn't make any sense to me at all that if you have a large tract of land, and you drill down into the ground, that you're going to tell me that everything you put down there and everything you loosen is only going to come up the pipe that you've put there, when the rainwater that falls on all of it, that none of that is going to come up the same way that the water cycles? That doesn't make any sense to me at all. I understand a lot of it in general terms, I'm not a scientist, but at the same point... It just doesn't make any sense.

Her husband, Rev. Schumann, is worried about the new reports citing Pennsylvania’s many unmarked and uncapped well holes from previous oil and gas drilling that create pathways for the chemicals to travel. Many environmentalists mirror these concerns, but others state that the injection itself is not nearly as precarious as the aboveground spills or the wastewater disposal.

Once water is injected into the well, it is drawn back up out of the ground and has to be disposed of. According to environmental scientist Charles Schmidt, the produced water is 30 to 70 percent of what was initially injected into the well, and contains not just the fracking chemicals, but also “enormous amounts of salt, some radionuclides, heavy metals, and other contaminants drawn to the surface from the shale formation below.”⁸⁴ According to Kargbo, et al., New York’s Department of Environmental Conservation (NYDEC) reported that thirteen samples of fracking wastewater from Marcellus Shale contained levels of radium-226 (226Ra) — up to 267 times the safe disposal limit and thousands of times the limit safe for people to drink.⁸⁵

⁸³ Peppard, “Invasive Procedures,” 1.

⁸⁴ Charles W. Schmidt. “Blind Rush? Shale Gas Boom Proceeds Amid Human Health Questions.” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119, no. 8 (August 2011): A352- A353.

⁸⁵ Kargbo, et al., 5681.

"It's bad, bad, stuff," says Scott Anderson of the Environmental Defense Fund, who spent many years working for the oil and gas industry. "So when industry argues that fracking hasn't caused any groundwater problems, what's overlooked are the hundreds of instances in which spills related to surface operations have contaminated other water supplies," he remarks.⁸⁶ Rev. Adler explains:

So the wastewater comes out, so the question that comes to my mind, is "What do you do with that water?" Sometimes they store it. They have ponds for the fresh water and ponds for the produced water, for the flowback. And these are huge ponds, acres big, lined with plastic. And what if that plastic breaks? What if there is a flood? Where does that water go? So it's either stored in these ponds, or they reuse it, but ultimately the water is dead. It either goes in large tankers or is injected into the ground.

These ponds have been known to leak, causing water contamination and severe human and animal health problems in Southeast Pennsylvania, in Washington County, where fracking has been going on for a longer time than in the synod area.⁸⁷ Storms like Hurricane Sandy also pose a great risk for the ponds. "Any time you have an open wastewater pit, you're vulnerable," said Rob Jackson, a biologist at Duke University, recalling how Hurricane Floyd of 1999 flooded hog waste lagoons, devastating rivers with raw sewage. He said that consequences with fracking wastewater would be even more severe. "There's a lot of risk with fracking ponds. You have organic chemicals, carcinogens, potential radioactivity, metals like arsenic and salts," Jackson said.⁸⁸

The volume of wastewater is immense: "each fracking event requires 2-4 million gallons of water," says Schmidt. "The EPA estimates 35,000 wells undergo fracking annually in the United States, requiring the amount of water consumed in a year by some 5 million people." And Pennsylvania's geology won't support re-injection of the wastewater into the ground.

⁸⁶ Schmidt, A352-A353.

⁸⁷ Humes, 54-55.

⁸⁸ Lynne Peeples. "Hurricane Sandy May Have Spared Fracking Operations, But Toxic Concerns Remain." *Huffington Post*, November 1, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/01/hurricane-sandy-fracking_n_2056293.html?view=print&comm_ref=false, 1.

Thus, wastewater from Pennsylvania must be trucked to another state, usually Ohio, or companies must convince local treatment plants to dispose of it. “The facilities, which are not equipped to remove salts, have often sent the frack water back into local rivers,” says Eliza Griswold. The result of this dumping caused severe consequences in the Monongahela River, she explains:

In 2008, a United States Steel plant in Clairton, Pa., complained that the water from the Monongahela River was unfit for use. Loaded with salts, the water tasted and smelled odd and was corroding not only industrial equipment but also dishwashers and kitchen faucets. For several months, the Monongahela River, which provides most people in the Pittsburgh area with drinking water, no longer met state and federal standards. Following a request from the State of Pennsylvania, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers found it would require five times the amount of water in their reservoirs to dilute the river. It took five months to clean it up.⁸⁹

The long-term ecological consequences of this episode and the others like it are not yet known, but biologists are quite anxious about the effect of dumps and leaks on the ecology of the waterways in Pennsylvania. Some are already attributing mass fish kills to the industry.

The lack of regulation to prevent such occurrences disturbs many synod members. Rev. Schumann worries that little enforcement of spills will lead to larger problems in the future:

There has been little enforcement of anything that goes on at the wells. They don't hire enough DEP [Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection] guys to go around and inspect. There are all these spills that are happening, and the gas companies say, "Oh yeah, we cleaned it up." Well, nobody is checking that. If this stuff is that dangerous, how come no one is checking a spill-site? Because that's where it is literally seeping down from the top and that's how it can get into the groundwater.

⁸⁹ Eliza Griswold. “The Fracturing of Pennsylvania.” The New York Times, November 17, 2011, sec. Magazine. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/20/magazine/fracking-amwell-township.html>, 8-9.

As Schmidt chronicles, “On 20 April 2011 (ironically, one year to the day since the BP Deepwater Horizon oil well blowout in the Gulf of Mexico), a natural gas well operated by Chesapeake Energy blew out in Bradford County, Pennsylvania [...] [and] spewed 35,000 gallons of wastewater and natural gas into the air for 16 hours, leading to more than a dozen residential evacuations.”⁹⁰ But most spills are much smaller and go unnoticed.

The accumulation of such spills over time could infiltrate the aquifer or river systems, allowing chemicals to not only contaminate local wells but also to travel downstream to more populated cities. New York State has banned fracking, citing the danger of contaminating the Delaware River Basin that provides the New York City area with water. Rev. Kappel states that the safety of drinking water is where it “hits home with a lot of folk” and has residents worried:

There have been reports already that it has affected some fish in the river. When they were parking the tanker trucks on the sides of highways, some of the trucks were leaking and that leakage was tested in labs. And in order to prevent that, they started parking them on the trestle over the river at Sunbury, so they couldn't be accessed. But then, does that mean that they are leaking directly into the water? And what they were planning to do was have diluting stations, where they were planning to bring the toxic wastewater in and dilute it with river water and release it into the stream. So whatever we dump in the river in Sunbury is going to work its way down to Maryland, where the Susquehanna River enters the Chesapeake Bay [to D.C.]. And the Chesapeake Bay has enough going against it!

As you can see in the map above, the synod counties are part of the Susquehanna River Basin. The Susquehanna River runs through the heart of the Synod area, and according to several people I interviewed, is a cherished part of the community's history and landscape. “The Susquehanna is one of the most ancient rivers on Earth. In its current state, it is a far cry from the pristine and primeval watershed that existed only a few centuries ago,” said Don Williams of the Susquehanna River Sentinel. “The threat posed by the natural gas industry and

⁹⁰ Schmidt, A351.

horizontal hydrofracturing will eclipse the environmental legacy of the lumber and coal-mining industries combined," he contended.⁹¹

Rev. Paul Lehrer, of Shamokin, says that the thought of putting fracking next to pristine places and sacred rivers frightens him. His brother tells him stories of fracking accidents in Texas:

[My brother] is a ranch manager and he said 'I can show you places where the fracking equipment messed up and there are 10 and 15 acre patches that will never be viable for anything to grow. They are ruined for generations.'

Pennsylvania also shows these symptoms of contamination, and will continue to, if companies are not careful, he contends. He references a spill that occurred the day before we spoke:

My girlfriend is a chaplain at the Williamsport Hospital. She was at another chaplain's house and that chaplain's husband is an EMT. And it came through that there was an injury and accident right on I-15 near Williamsport and they had to go out and put on their protective suits. It was a traffic accident, one of the trucks with the fracking fluid, and it turned into a hazardous material situation.

Rev. Lehrer concludes that it is only a matter a time before people start getting sick.

In fact, health effects from fracking, from both water contamination and air pollution from gas flaring, are already being reported throughout the country, particularly in Pennsylvania, though the causality is hard to prove in a court of law or even in a doctor's office. Almost no epidemiological studies have been done, says Bernard Goldstein, a professor in the Graduate School of Public Health at the University of Pittsburgh. "We get lots of complaints from individuals about air quality near these fracking operations," Goldstein says. "They smell things that don't make them feel well, but we know nothing about cause-and-effect relationships in these cases."⁹² Humes paints an even grimmer picture:

⁹¹ "Susquehanna Named Most Endangered River in the Nation." *American Rivers*, May 17, 2011. <http://www.americanrivers.org/newsroom/press-releases/2011/susquehanna-named-most-endangered-river-5-17-2011.html>, 1.

⁹² Schmidt, A351.

[Pennsylvania] farmers complain of stillborn and deformed calves near fracking operations. Residential well water has turned murky and undrinkable.

Homeowners near massive gas compressor stations complain of respiratory ailments, chronically sick children, and the sudden deaths of pets. While cause and effect is often hotly disputed – particularly when it comes to sources of water-well contamination – similar complaints are echoed in communities throughout the state and nation wherever shale gas is being drilled.⁹³

Rev. Engel says that he sees the health effects in his parishioners, but that the legal gag rules (discussed in the next section) and the reserved nature of his congregations make it difficult for people to speak of it openly:

I see the patients in the hospital. Quite obviously with one man, a month after they drilled across from his property, symptoms started showing and now he is in a wheel chair. And the doctors can find all sorts of stuff in his blood. He's on disability now and slowly getting better. But he can't talk about it with the community. No one can. Because of litigation.

He sees water tanks mysteriously appearing on the front lawns of his parishioners' properties, but they rarely talk about it. The gas companies will often provide water tanks if a family's well is made dry or tainted with chemicals, in exchange for the silence on the issue, he observed.

Rev. Schumann worries about the fate of small towns like Liberty if such contamination occurred:

But my concern with water is that the dairy farmers would be ruined. [...] Because I couldn't imagine running city water out that far. If you ruin your water supply, that finishes off a community.

Others that I interviewed cite the environmental legacy of previous industries in Pennsylvania and connect it to their concerns about the shale gas industry. Rev. Paul Lehrer, who pastors a church in Shamokin, an old coal boomtown, points to travesties like the Centralia

⁹³ Humes, 54.

underground fire. Centralia, the town twenty minutes from his church, was permanently evacuated because a coal mine ignited and has been burning for decades. Becky Loft, a member of Rev. Adler's church near Lewisburg, agrees that there is reason for trepidation:

I feel like companies are definitely going to be in it for the money and what they can get out of it. My concern is that, first of all, there aren't enough safety practices. I have concerns about the water tables and what's going to happen to that. And I worry about what happens when they're done with the state and the area, and what's happens when they leave. I just saw a thing on CBS on Sunday morning, and they were talking about an island off of Japan. And at one time, it was thriving and lots of money, because they were doing coal mining. And it's kind of like we are right now, in some areas of Pennsylvania. Where there is this boom. And, the economy was wonderful and then the coal ran out. And they were just showing the ruins of what's left. Because everyone left and it's just like a ghost town on this island. And my husband and I commented that, if there is no one watching, that is what is going to happen here. And, I just have a lot of concerns for what's going to be left. Because [the companies] aren't worried.

Those that voted for the synod resolution and memorial to put a moratorium on fracking cited that they have real concerns about the unforeseen consequences of moving ahead with the gas industry before adequate testing has been done on its effects. As Mr. Bauer remarks:

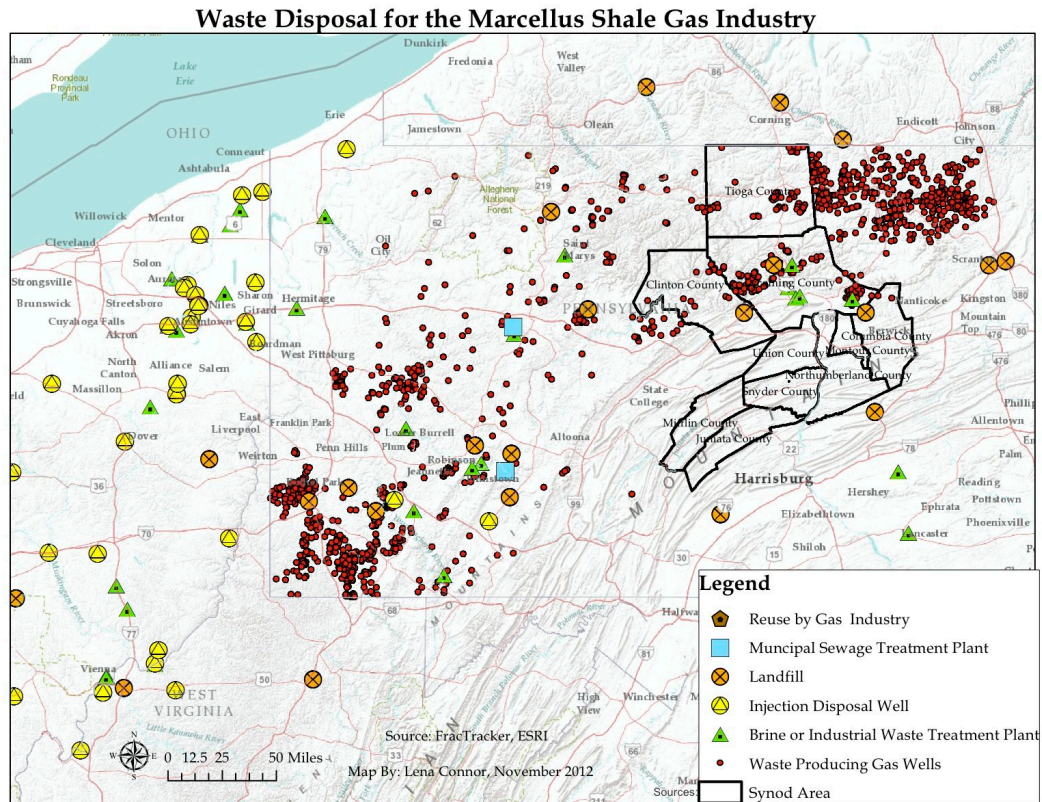
I think that the process that they use is still in its infancy. It's a new technology. I did like when [the resolution] said we should stop any new drilling before we could have more research. They weren't necessarily saying to shut down the existing wells. But I liked that the idea that we don't need to rush, so let's figure out what's actually happening.

Rev. Schumann echoes his concerns:

There are still a lot of answered questions. Originally, we were told fracking was water and sand. 'Well, sure, ok. Go ahead! There is not harm in that,' [we thought]. But now all of the sudden, we find out that there are tons of chemicals that are carcinogenic. If it were too dangerous to deal with on top of the ground, why would you put that in the ground?

He advocates for a precautionary principle that would pause industry growth, as the resolution calls for. Theologian Christiana Peppard also supports the idea of pausing industry growth, declaring, "To thoughtfully examine reality is virtuous; to obfuscate it, vicious. Only with more

knowledge will we be able to decide whether, in the case of fracking, we are counting our blessings or squandering them.⁹⁴



Map. 4: Waste Disposal for the Marcellus Shale, Source: Lena Connor

Industry Safety:

Beyond the inherent dangers of the industry, the synod members comment often on the specific safety practices of different gas companies. Rev. Schumann states that certain companies have a better track record than others:

We're the only one with Anadarko. All our neighbors have Shell. And Anadarko isn't playing nice with others. I'm a little annoyed at this. And from what I've heard, Shell has a much better safety record than Anadarko. If I'm going to be with somebody, I'd much rather be with somebody who is a little better at [their job].

⁹⁴ Peppard. "Spewing Forth." *Catholic Moral Theology*, December 8, 2011. <http://catholicmoraltheology.com/spewing-forth/>.

He and others express concern that companies were being negligent about safety practices with workers and with environmental protection:

We had one of the young adults at Holy Spirit who was working for Haliburton, and they wanted him to go into this pit and clean up something. And he said, 'Let me see the spec sheet,' because apparently workers are supposed to get fact sheets on what type of chemicals they're going to be dealing with. 'We don't have one available,' [his boss] responded. And he said, 'Well, alright, give me the clean up gear to wear,' and they said, 'Oh, you don't need that.' The last guy that came out of that pit was carted off to the hospital. So this [young man] got really upset about it and he ended up quitting over it. And he felt horrible quitting a good paying job, but it's not worth his life!

His wife said the company's sentiment was: "You're just some dumb kid, you should be grateful for the job. Now get in there and do it." And they mostly will, Rev. Schumann observed, because "there is an endless supply of folks looking for jobs that will jump in without thinking about it."

But others in the synod are frustrated with this portrait of the industry, saying that most companies did their best to apply rigorous standards. Mr. Hiland says that his grandson had told him that the company he worked for was very conscientious:

Oh, I talked to my boy yesterday. They take him from one well to another well. But when they take the pipes off they have to lay them on a rug. It's so hot working on the big black rug. But they have to have that rug so there is no drip into the ground or the acids. And there is acid. They use lots.

Justin Heinz expresses his frustration with media coverage of the fracking dangers:

It's safe. If you watch "Gasland," it's almost laughable. It's a liberal head job. It uses untruth to be a factual document and it's just a lie. They show Dimock residents who say they have gas in their water. They've always had gas in their water. All their lives. It seeps up naturally. They say, "Oh they are getting sick from it." Well if that's the case, what about the workers on the well pads? I've worked on them, my men work on them. I wouldn't let them on it if it wasn't safe. No one is sick. No is having any issues. If we're in direct contact with everything involved in fracking, why aren't we all ill?

In his vehement vindication of the industry, Mr. Heinz often painted those who opposed it as personally attacking his competence as a contractor. I got the sense that he feared that if

environmentalists defeated fracking, he would lose his job and have few other options for employment.

That said, across the board, the debate in the public sphere about methane in the water related to fracking has been fractious – pun intended – as communities in the mountain did have methane in their water before fracking. The famous image of people in Dimock, Pennsylvania lighting their water on fire has been contested, as others in the area have been able to do so for many decades. The debate is over whether the gas drilling and exploration has caused *more* methane infiltration and what levels of contamination are safe for human ingestion.

As Rev. Engel stated:

It is also hard to prove [contamination] in an area where the water has always been bad. None of our drinking water is up to public standards. It is simply the geology, I would think. A nearby town got hooked up to public water because of the methane in the water fifty years ago. People have been able to light their taps for a while.

Trevor Smith writes that he is also frustrated with the liberal coverage of fracking, maintaining that films like “Gasland” are one-sided and demonize the industry. Environmental groups have harped on the natural gas industry instead of working with industry to establish best practice, he claims.⁹⁵ Also, Smith states that concerns about the upward migration of fracking fluids are absurd. The productive area of the Marcellus Shale is located at depths ranging from 4,000-8,500 feet underground. Aquifers are found at depths less than 1,000 feet. “Fracturing fluid migration from deep shale wells into fresh-water aquifers has not been observed,” Smith says.⁹⁶

Mr. Heinz says that in his experience working on the well pads, the benefits outweigh the costs of the industry:

People just need to be a little more understanding on the fracking issue. When DEP says it's safe, people should respect that. There are a lot of good professionals in the DEP and the EPA. And they are looking at it on their level. And they're the professionals. You'll hear of a fish kill and something stupid about a spill. Yeah, there will be some mistakes.

⁹⁵ Smith, 53.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 56.

But you can't make an omelet without cracking a few eggs. We can get rid of our foreign dependency right here.

He says that worries about waste-water are unfounded, though if people are really concerned they should look into promoting companies that use green practices:

If you want to be a green company like BP and Shell, those companies are really conscientious. Of course, BP would be. It's very hard to work on their sites. They are so anal. I could take you to TriCan and they could explain exactly what they do. They are a Canadian company and their process is 100 percent green. They won't tell you what chemicals they use, but you could get an idea of the process.

When I spoke to Ted Lowe, the other gas worker that I interviewed, he said that some safety concerns are warranted, but not all. He asserts that it was very company and worker dependent:

As far as safety, they were all pretty [good]. I guess I was a little less concerned than they were. Because I actually worked around it every day. And I knew the guys that I worked with and their safety precautions. Every day you go through numerous safety meetings. But, unfortunately, a lot of people out there are very careless with what they do. You know, with what I was doing with explosives, there was really no room for being careless or complacent.

He does cite one scary example of negligence and shed light onto the work climate that causes it:

We actually had an engineer almost kill an entire crew. We just had a shift change and he was trying to hurry up and get the gun down in the well, so he would get more of a bonus, and when he did so he knocked over another gun that he already had armed. Had it landed a certain way, it would have cleared the whole well pad.

And he knew of several men who had died on the job, including a man who had been cut in half by a machine on a well pad. He explained that carelessness often occurs when the men on the rig are tired, which is often because their work rotations are brutal:

You know, you work a 12-14 hour shift and you go back to the hotel and shower and sleep and get up in the morning and do it all over again. I mean, a lot of guys out there, they'll go back to the hotel and are supposed to go to sleep. But they're all strung up from being at work all day long, so they want to go have a beer or shoot some pool or talk to their family on the phone. And they don't get as much sleep.

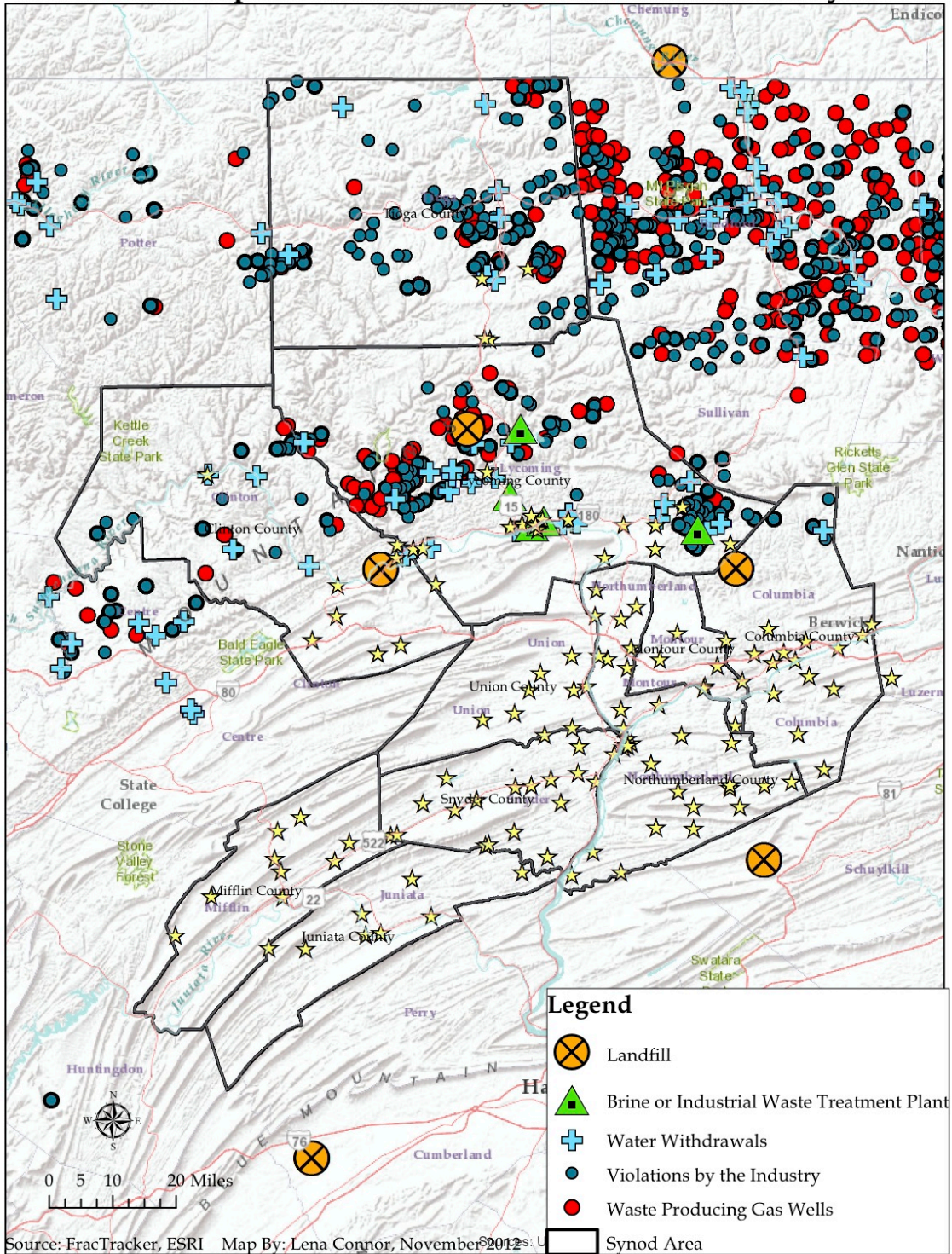
He worked for Halliburton, the company affiliated with Dick Cheney and the BP Gulf oil spill, but he was pleased with the safety and environmental regulation of that company and the other companies under which Halliburton contracted. He knows the company was experimenting with an alternative, green form of frack fluid. The man who invented it allegedly stood up in front of a room full of investors and drank a glass to prove its harmlessness. The men on the rig had been as careful as possible about spills, he says, though accidents do happen:

A lot of the companies I worked for were very cautious about spills. On one of the well pads that I was working on, it was snowing and there was ice on the ground and we had a [hose full of anti-freeze material for the equipment]. And one guy was very, very new and he didn't give it enough slack and the crane picked it up and separated the line. And then it was spraying me with glycol, which is about 180 degrees. I wasn't too pleased about that. But we got ahold of the line and one of the guys hollered at me and we got it over to the trashcan. And he instantly got the fifty-gallon drum trashcan out. And so, instead of having a [big] spill, we contained it. Most of it was only on me. It burned like hell, but I had enough clothing on that I didn't get hurt.

But, on the whole, he argues, he thinks that the companies are making an effort to remain safe and conscientious.

Whether this conscientiousness is true of most companies or not, in these quotes from the two gas workers, you can see a tendency to get defensive of the companies when they are critiqued by those who say they take no safety measures. This speaks to an understandable loyalty to their employer. Although, it is interesting to note that Mr. Justin Heinz is much more aggressive in his defense, which might be because he is in a managerial role. Whereas Mr. Ted Lowe, who is lower in the pecking order, will open up about mistakes the industry made.

Waste Disposal for the Marcellus Shale Gas Industry



Map 5: Waste Disposal and Industry Violations in the Synod Counties; Source: Lena Connor

Political Climate Surrounding Fracking:

Others in the synod lack trust in the companies, doubting the industries could adequately hold themselves accountable and needed strict regulation to act in a responsible manner. Rev. Engel says that he is personal very “leery” about fracking:

I realize that it is something that is not going away and that we'll have to deal with. What upsets me is that on the government end, they haven't made much effort to regulate the industry or monitor the industry. And that's my biggest beef with it. It's not going to go away. There is too much money invested in it already. But can we not have more disclosure about what is going on back in that mountain? What impact does it really have on people?

He wishes the Pennsylvania government were bolder in its legislative action to ensure the safety of its citizens and its environment:

But this is Pennsylvania, and the government doesn't want to deal with and doesn't want to make regulations. Unless things go terribly wrong, they won't do anything. Unless fish go belly-up in Harrisburg, you can dump what you want in the river. You wish the government would stand up and say “These are the regulations for the industry. Please abide by them.” But you know. There are good companies and there are bad companies. Some people do whatever they want and get away with it. It's just human nature. Us theologians we have to say something about that. We know how that is. If you can get something for free or for cheap, you're going to do it.

Many in the synod complain about the secrecy that companies are allowed due to a state legislative piece called Act 13 and a national loophole under the Bush Administration for fracking. Under the Bush-Cheney loophole for the shale gas industry, which critics call the “Halliburton Loophole,” shale gas initiatives are exempt from the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act and companies are not required to disclose the chemicals they use in frack fluid. They are allowed to keep them hidden as trade secrets,⁹⁷ which infuriates Rev. Kappel:

One of the things that I've been concerned about was when the Bush energy acts were put in place, all those regulations [on fracking] that were hammered out behind closed doors, exemptions from the Clean Air Act, from the Clean Water Act, etc. Why must they be exempt if there is nothing wrong with this business?

⁹⁷ Griswold, 8.

The Obama administration has recently tightened these regulations slightly, stating that companies must release the names of the chemicals used during the process, but do not have to do so until *after* they have begun drilling and fracking.⁹⁸ The gas industry said that advanced disclosure would be expensive and inefficient. Peppard expresses her disgust at such rhetoric, saying, “It is almost always in the interests of the powerful to act first and apologize later.”⁹⁹

Under Pennsylvania’s Act 13, passed on February 14, 2012, municipalities are not allowed to ban or regulate fracking and override the state allowances, says Rev. Adler. As she explains, if a worker or any local person comes into contact with fracking chemicals and gets sick, the doctor is allowed to find out from the company what chemicals have made the person sick and is allowed to tell the person. But the person is not allowed to tell anybody else, including the media, nor can the doctor publish research about it, because it’s a trade secret. Also, under Act 13, wells and compressor stations can be as close as 300 feet from a school, a hospital, or a day care center, despite the danger of blowouts and leaks.

Rev. Adler says that she is overwhelmingly frustrated by what she sees as an unethical corporate influence in the state government.

The Corbit administration, the governor of Pennsylvania, has received millions of dollars from the gas industry and basically won the election with that help. He has done everything he can to minimize any regulation and to bring as much fracking into the state as possible under the guise of jobs, jobs, jobs.

Several with whom I spoke voiced frustration at the anti-regulation climate of the Pennsylvania state government. But Rev. Adler, because of her activism and months of research on the topic, was the most incensed:

And it’s not just the governor. I would have to say 80 percent of politicians in Pennsylvania – Democrat and Republican – are in on this. When you look at the amount of money that the gas industry has spent on campaigns. [It is] into the hundreds of millions of dollars. It’s corporate fascism, is what it is. That’s why we’re so upset about this!

⁹⁸ Peppard, “Invasive Procedures,” 1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

Rev. Bobby Hahn, a pastor in Mazeppa (in Union County), says it is less lobbying and more about pragmatism, which he condones:

And that's the whole approach whether you're Democrat or Republican – the whole approach in Pennsylvania will be 'We can do it. We can honor the environmental regulations. We can do both.' Because [fracking] is going to be the future of Pennsylvania. That's what they're all banking on.

But Humes' claims support Rev. Adler, as he argues that the gas industry had been ruthless in Pennsylvania to get its way and "has employed prodigious lobbying, campaign donations, even the hiring of retired military psychological warfare experts to tar opponents as antibusiness, job-killing eco-fanatics."¹⁰⁰

Other environmental groups have also spoken out loudly in Pennsylvania and around the country about the industry's negative political influence. "Natural gas drilling poses one of the greatest risks our nation's rivers have faced in decades," says Andrew Fahlund, senior vice president for conservation at American Rivers. "Without strong regulations, public health and drinking water will be threatened by the toxic, cancer-causing pollution that results from hydraulic fracturing."¹⁰¹

The America's Most Endangered Rivers Program named the Susquehanna River the most endangered river in 2011, because of the threats of the shale gas industry. It recommended the following solutions: that the national and state legislatures adopt a moratorium on fracking until better research is available; more analysis and regulation by the Susquehanna River Basin Commission; the removal of legislative loopholes and incentives for the industry; and the passage of strict zoning and environmental regulations on the industry.¹⁰² "We call on the Susquehanna River Basin Commission to immediately impose a moratorium on any new drilling in the Susquehanna River Basin, as was done by the Delaware River Basin

¹⁰⁰ Humes, 54.

¹⁰¹ "Susquehanna named most..." *American Rivers*, 1.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 1.

Commission,” said Jeff Schmidt, Director of the Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter. “Until Pennsylvania, the SRBC and the federal government adopt new laws and regulations to fully protect public health and the environment from the dangers of Marcellus Shale gas drilling, no new drilling should be allowed,” Schmidt continued.¹⁰³

Others in the synod argued that more regulation is not what the state needs. Doug Heinz, father of Justin Heinz, said that overregulation was not only unnecessary but would scare the gas industry away from Pennsylvania. Rev. Hahn also questioned the rhetoric of those pushing for more regulation, saying that such an attitude showed a lack of faith in the government’s judgement about what was the appropriate amount of regulation: .

People elect these leaders and I need pray for them, but also realize that they are working to do the best thing possible. The rhetoric right now is that all these politicians are crooked. But you find that these people are not crooks out to steal people’s money. They do really care about [their constituents.]

Mr. Justin Heinz thinks that regulation for fracking, particularly on state lands is already too cumbersome, making fracking more common in Tioga County and Bradford County than in Clinton County, which is mostly state land. He says that permits can take up to six months to get approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Mrs. Schumann says that she thinks the anti-regulation mentality in rural Pennsylvania comes from a long history of distrust of the government and a strong sense of individualism. She uses the example of Tioga County:

Zoning and rules in regulation that we’re familiar with, being from more developed areas, is very loose in Tioga County. It just doesn’t exist and farmers resisted any type of new zoning. ‘You can’t tell me what to do with my woods, my farm, my anything and I won’t have it!’ [they say]. Now they are finding the consequences of agreeing on standards because they didn’t want to be bound by those themselves. It’s really have a detrimental effect because the [industry] is not bound by them either and its changing the nature of some of the communities. It’s honestly making life difficult for everyone.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1.

Rev. Jim Erikson says that he attributes the attitude to an inherited idea of “reciprocal liberty” which leads locals to say, “I’ll extend all the freedom that you want to you, as long as you do the same to me.” But such a philosophy works better for small farmers than for big industry, he thinks.

Similarly, Mrs. Loft balks at the claims of one of her family members that the gas industry is already too regulated:

She mentioned something yesterday about the gas companies leaving the area because there were too many regulations. And I thought, ‘Good Lord! There aren’t any regulations! So what did they want?’ I couldn’t believe it. I thought maybe that was the rhetoric so people felt sorry for the poor gas companies.

It frustrates her that Pennsylvania is failing to tax the companies properly, due to the Tea Party mentality of the current state government:

We’re not asking the gas companies to financially help out. And we’re giving them all kinds of breaks. And yet our schools are suffering tremendously because there are so many financial cuts. So we’re cutting our kids education but not asking them to help lift that. And they need to show some financial responsibility. And we need to be making sure that they abiding by laws that protect that land and the people.

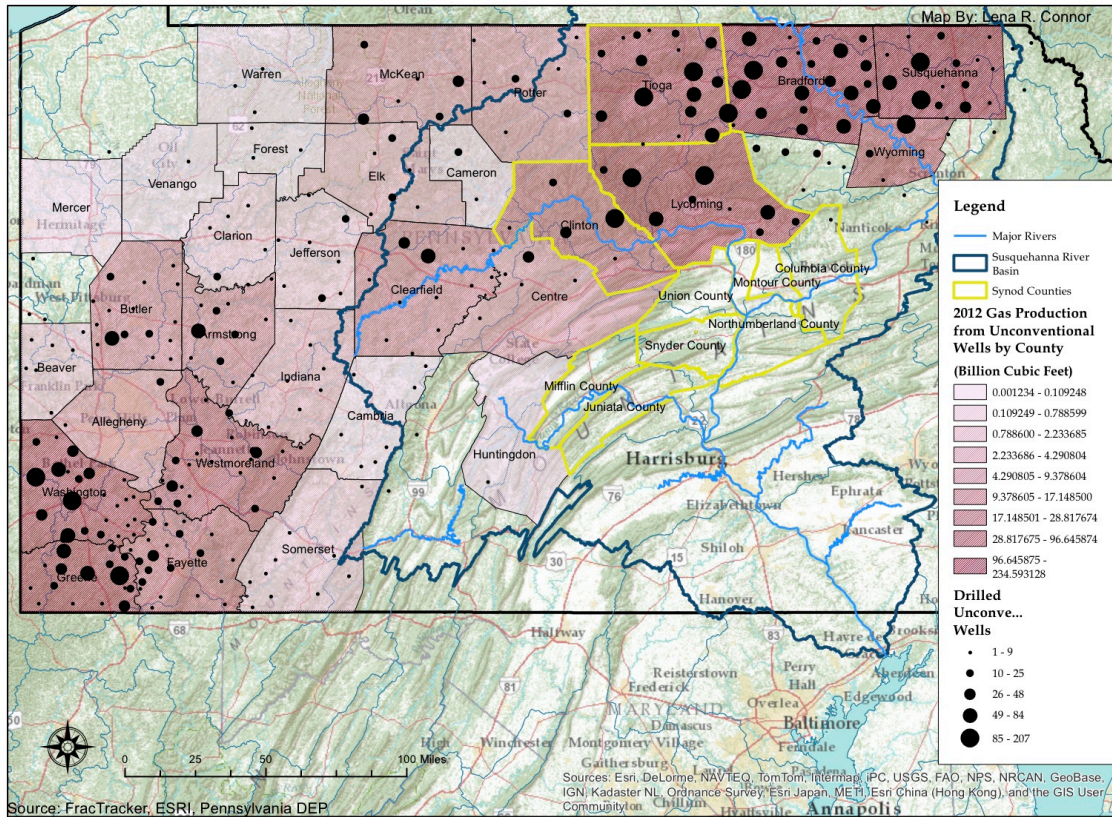
Pennsylvania is the only state among the top 15 gas-producing states without an extraction tax on natural gas.¹⁰⁴

Rev. Schumann stated that he believes the gas industry is purposefully hitting places like Tioga County and other parts of western Pennsylvania because the state governments value the rural communities less and the companies think these counties are an easier target than more populous areas. “There is no adequate infrastructure to protect the environment and the people who live there,” he said Pennsylvania, as it has for much of its history, bears the brunt of the industry, while more progressive states like New York protect their citizens and habitats. Even Mr. Hoffmann, who is in favor of the industry, says it irritates him that the gas companies are targeting the rural townships that have uneducated supervisors. He thinks that the key to

¹⁰⁴Amy Reumann. “Natural Gas Drilling in the Marcellus Shale.” *Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania Blog*, 2012. <http://lutheranadvocacypa.org/introduction-to-natural-gas-drilling/>.

preventing the negative effects of the industry will be properly informing the supervisors of the risks.

Shale Natural Gas Production in Pennsylvania



Map 6: Shale Natural Gas Production in Pennsylvania; Source: Lena Connor

Economic Impact of Fracking:

But Mr. Hoffmann also says that those small townships were in desperate need of an economic upturn. He says that as he traveled that area as a veterinarian, he saw the poverty and high debts of the farmers. They often could not pay him for his work. The same upturn is needed for the American economy, some argue. As Peppard recounts, in June of 2011, the Wall Street Journal declared, “A new gusher of natural gas from shale has the potential to transform U.S. energy production – that is, unless politicians, greens and the industry mess it up.” David

Brooks identified U.S. shale gas as a “blessing” but warned that, because of political polarization, “we groan to absorb even the most wondrous gifts.”¹⁰⁵

Peppard argues that such rhetoric is blinded by a false optimism about the virtues of the industry: “By looking – hard – before we leap, we are more likely to achieve the human and ecological well-being that undergird any meaningful, long-term economic growth. Otherwise, we may find ourselves building unstable bridges towards the Promised Land, only to discover that we have pursued a mirage.”¹⁰⁶ Skeptics say that the gas boom, like so many extractive industry booms before it, is only temporary and will not build healthy economies in the locales where it is placed. But proponents say that in the areas that contain shale, rural Pennsylvania especially, desperately need the jobs and economic boost.

“Unconventional” oil and natural gas drilling supports 1.7 million jobs, says Laurent Belsie of the *Christian Science Monitor*. By 2020, he states, it will support 1.3 million more positions.¹⁰⁷ Belsie says that growth has been only “tepid” in Pennsylvania so far, which only ranks 37th among the 50 states in terms of job creation over the past year. “But its mining sector has nearly doubled in the past three years, with 39,100 workers as of September, according to the Department of Labor,” Belsie comments.¹⁰⁸ And almost all of those added jobs have been in fracking. This growth has been harmful for the coal industry in Pennsylvania and West Virginia, which is laying off workers.¹⁰⁹ Rev. Lehrer says that he sees the coal lay-offs in his region already and that people in area are attributing it to the power plant conversions from coal to gas. Kathryn Z. Klaber of the Marcellus Shale Coalition, an industry-backed group, stated that Marcellus Shale production has increased 80 percent in the last year, since 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Peppard, “Spewing Forth,” 1.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Laurent Belsie. “Natural Gas and Unconventional Oil Jobs: 1.7 Million and Counting.” *CSM Blog: Energy Voices: Insights on the Future of Fuel and Power*, October 23, 2012. <http://www.csmonitor.com/Environment/Energy-Voices/2012/1023/Natural-gas-and-unconventional-oil-jobs-1.7-million-and-counting.>, 1.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

“This responsible production is making our nation more secure and helping to create literally tens of thousands of good jobs at a time when they’re most needed,” she asserts.¹¹⁰

Many in the synod, even those who are opposed to fracking, stated that the new jobs and cash flow in the area were necessary for economically hurting communities. Mrs. Loft stated:

I’m not happy about [fracking], my children aren’t happy about it. But there is a faction that are [happy]. We were at a family reunion yesterday and two of the young men were employed by the gas industry and they couldn’t find anything else. So that creates a different [aspect of the issue] where at least there is work where there was none.

As explained in the last chapter, as agriculture supplies fewer and fewer jobs in the synod, people get desperate. Rev. Schumann explained that the traditional dairy lifestyle in the northern counties is hurting:

It’s been really hard for folks in Liberty. Milk prices have been flat – literally flat – in their returns for about forty years. Almost all the dairy farmers have some other type of income. They love what they do, but they can’t make any money.

Rev. Engel explained that in his area, towns are dwindling, as children leave to find better prospects in urban areas. Education is not valued, because its something that takes your children away from you. And the morale of these rural citizens is low:

Many congregations are full of the people who didn’t get out of here. And I think in a way they are aware of that. You know, their brothers or sisters or friends at school have made it and are in New Jersey or the Carolinas or wherever you go. And they are here stuck with the family farm. And some are really stuck with the family farm. You know, they can’t take care of it anymore and can’t make a living on it. The burden is on them to keep the house that has been the family homestead for generations, to keep that up and in order. At the same time, [they feel responsibility] to keep up the community life. To keep the church going, to keep the community hall going. They see the buildings dilapidating and don’t have the money to fix things up.

Rev. Lehrer explained that the desperation in towns that once had industry, but no longer do, such as Shamokin, is palpable and causes deep social and economic insecurity. Rev. Engel says that he feels for his congregants:

¹¹⁰ Kathryn Z. Klaber. “Should Fracking Be Part of Our Energy Future?” *The New York Times*, August 31, 2012, sec. Opinion. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/01/opinion/should-fracking-be-part-of-our-energy-future.html>, 1.

You watch things that you have inherited from your parents fall apart and there is nothing you can do. There is a sense of being deprived of the riches of this country. All the booms of the 80s and 90s, they have not been participating in.

So when money started coming in from fracking and his parishioners were grateful, he could not help understanding the sentiment:

I have a kid that has been in jail for three years and then he got a welding license and now he makes twice the money that I do. So some people get decent, decent salaries out of [the companies].

The money from the wells has allowed many farmers to fix up their farms, buy new tractors, and pay off their debts. The funny thing is, Mrs. Schumann observed, that farmers rarely spent the money on frivolous things or even on house maintenance, but almost always put the gas money back into the farm. One synod member told me a story of a fourth-generation farmer who was about to lose his farm, but then the gas companies came and put a well on his land and now he makes \$40,000 a month and is a millionaire. But he hasn't stopped farming.

When fracking came into the northern half of the synod, there were many who were thrilled. Mr. Heinz said that Jersey Shore and Williamsport are considered a "hudzone," a "Habitual Urban Disadvantaged Area." "Historically, we're disadvantaged because of where we are. I mean, there is nothing here," he stated. He stated that his peers left the area because of lack of opportunity, but that he hoped fracking would stop this trend:

That's been a very big problem here. Before, when you graduated from Lycoming College or Penn State or Penn Tech, where would you go? Now, you can take courses and Penn Tech that will allow you to work [in gas] and stay right here.

His father, Mr. Doug Heinz, explained that the gas industry also boosted employment in other sectors:

Here's another way to look at it too. Not only does it employ people, but your groceries stores are making money, etc. People who work on the wells have to buy clothes [and] they have to buy food.

Mr. Lowe explains that the non-gas jobs in Pennsylvania are much lower than the rest of the country. He says that in North Carolina he would be paid \$2,500 a week for the same job he would be paid \$400 to do in Pennsylvania.

Ted Lowe and Justin Heinz say that they are very pleased with the financial treatment of the gas companies. Mr. Lowe, who has five children and a fiancé to support, was facing the need to apply for government assistance and food stamps when he heard about the gas jobs:

My brother-in-law worked for Chesapeake Energy. And he was making quite a bit of money and I was tired of making peanuts. So I got online and I applied to about 20 companies and Halliburton was the first to call me back. They asked me a lot of different questions [including] whether I minded working with explosives. And my eyes lit up like a little boy in the candy shop.

He made up to \$6,000 a week when work was plentiful. And the gas company gave him full health benefits for his family.

But others in the synod say that they see many of the jobs going to outsider gas workers that companies ship in from places like Texas and Louisiana, where there are more people with the necessary skills. Rev. Schumann said:

We had a pastors' retreat up in Wellsboro and all of the fracking people that we met were from Louisiana or Texas. So the jobs that have been created have all been for people from out of state, because they had the skills, they knew what they were doing. So the gas companies literally just imported people and equipment to do the work. They're hiring local drivers for the water trucks and they're establishing some local offices, so they'll be some support staff hired. But the jobs really haven't been that big of a boom, as everyone has been expected.

Some I spoke with worried that the influx of gas workers would change the communities. They observed that the migrant workers were not putting down roots and had no expectation of staying or raising families in the communities. Neither were they becoming a part of churches and local organizations. Rather, the workers were renting a room and sending money to support their families back home, synod members claimed. According to Justin Heinz, local

versus outside hiring depends on the managers of the companies. As a contractor for the industry, he says he hires both:

I have some out of state guys. Those with specialized skills. They come from Ohio, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, Tennessee, Florida, and the Carolinas... But they are pretty much gypsies. They follow the industry and when the work is done, they go. But [I also give] full time jobs to the community, to Pennsylvania residents.

He makes an effort to hire locals and always hire veterans if he can. He is a veteran himself; he served in Iraq, where he first learned about the concept of fracking for petroleum.

Many also mentioned the spike in housing prices in the area, due to the large influx of migrant workers moving into town. Rev. Engel said that housing in the northern half of the synod has pushed out the poor and disadvantaged who do not have the skills to work in the industry:

We have a big housing issue because of the fracking. Rent prices have tripled in Williamsport. And it's the lowest classes that don't have housing anymore. So the only choice is to retreat into the woods.

He explained that many of the local poor are not qualified for jobs due to their age, their gender, physical and mental disabilities, lack of education, or substance abuse issues. The industry has caused a new surge in the homeless population and government-subsidized housing isn't able to contend with the influx:

And I know that from my one family [from my church] up in Liberty that applied for public housing. In Williamsport, they didn't even try. And they tried in Tioga County and Clinton County. First of all, there is very little availability. So they are probably going to be displaced farther out west.

By retreating into the woods to live in makeshift cabins in the mountains, they lack access to good education for their children and they often live closer to the gas wells.

Rev. Alder cites this fact as one of the many environmental justice concerns surrounding fracking. She tells the story of a thirty low-income families who lived in a trailer community called Riverdale near Jersey Shore. A subsidiary company of the gas industry called Aqua

America bought the land by the river that the trailers had been on for thirty years to pump water from the river to supply the gas companies. Rev. Adler says that she and several other pastors and community leaders fought the decision, but ultimately lost the battle:

The industry came in and displaced the community, even though, on either side of the property, there were two businesses, owned by the landowner, that could have been used instead. In my opinion, they targeted this community, thinking they were non-people, that they didn't matter [and that society wouldn't care].

She and others voice concern that the industry will continue to exacerbate the poverty in the area and perpetuate the unstable boom and bust economy of the northern portion of the Synod.

I spoke briefly with one synod member named Ralph Johnson who owns a hotel near Williamsport and was thrilled with the amount of gas workers needing accommodation. He has expanded his hotel and it is full every night. Rev. Kappel says that he has seen five new hotels in Lewisburg as well, but is worried what will happen when the drilling is finished and fewer workers are required to maintain the wells. Rev. Dr. Robin Vogt, the professor local Lutheran seminary, is apprehensive and thinks the fracking will be just one more temporary, false “salvation” for Pennsylvania:

Well yes, the majority of people are saying, 'Thank God, here is something that will get us back [to a healthy rural economy].' They want the money that comes [with fracking]. But the question is: if that [economic boom] comes, how long will it be here? This has been a globalized [endeavor] from the beginning. The stuff about “energy for America” [is misleading]. The pipeline is coming. And when it comes it will take the gas to the Chesapeake Bay and they will liquefy it and take it to the world market. Or, you know, the governor with that new cracker plant in Western PA, that's to send [plastics] elsewhere.

Many synod members, both for and against fracking, expect the gas to be transported to places like China, which will pay a higher price for the natural gas. Rev. Kappel voices his frustrations with the industry rhetoric about energy independence:

On the economic side, I understand that much of the gas that they produce here is going to go to China. I don't know if people know that this is a marketing thing. It's going to take American resources and send them overseas.

Rev. Dr. Vogt worries that the majority of revenue from gas will not be distributed among local residents in Pennsylvania, but instead will go directly to wealthy shareholders of multinational petroleum corporations.

Synod members say that the ebb and flow of the gas industry is already starting to show in the counties; gas prices have dropped severely due to the large increase in supply. Therefore, many companies have slowed down work and have laid off workers. Mr. Lowe only worked for Halliburton for 10 months when the work dried up:

I would have stayed with the gas company, but unfortunately after Christmas, the gas prices dropped and our work pretty much stopped.

While the company did not fire him, the low salary in the waiting period could not adequately support his family, so he had to quit:

Well, basically for the last month that I was working there, I was only working about twenty hours during that whole month. They had me sitting around waiting for a job. Granted, they were paying me for 40 hours a week to sit around and wait, but when you are used to making \$1200 a week and you're only making \$400 a week, well... it kind of hurts a little bit. When you have five kids to take care of.

He now works for a trucking company hauling food products, but says that if another job in the gas industry opened up, he would consider it. But he is pondering leaving the state, because he wants steady employment for the sake of this family.

Trans. Rev. Schumann says that any conversation about fracking has to be considered in terms of the long-term energy future of Pennsylvania and the United States, even though he is also tempted to think about short-term economic benefits:

But I'm looking at the economics of it all and you know, it would be very helpful if they were going to do this and do it well. It would be a huge help, actually, with kids getting out of college and student loans coming in. I don't want to pay off my kids' student loans on the demise of Tioga County, but the economic advantages need to be considered in the conversation. How can this be done in a safe way? And can we see this a bridge resource until we get into renewables? Natural gas is better than coal and oil and all of the other stuff. But we're not doing anything on the other side of the bridge yet. We're not developing [renewable energy] enough. We claim that we're building this bridge [with natural gas] but it's a bridge to nowhere!

Rev. Dr. Vogt says that as a theologian, he realizes that there are no black-and-white answers to the moral questions surrounding fracking, but there is a moral lens through which one can examine fracking:

That's why, when people ask me, "Is it totally wrong to do this?" I say, "It's not totally wrong, but it's the pace at which we do this which is really the wrong thing. It's that voracious, typical capitalist mentality that we have to develop it as quickly as possible. If we could go at it slowly, it would be a whole different scene.

Concluding Thoughts:

As I drove around the synod area, spending my days talking to the synod members, I found myself as torn about the gas industry as many of them were. The complexity of situation makes it impossible to propose easy solutions. Many in the synod admit humbly that they have few answers but many questions. The impetus behind the synod request for a moratorium stems from this collective yearning for more time to consider the issue. Mr. Lowe expressed it this way:

I think as far as building the economy and giving people jobs, if the gas prices come back up, I think it's going to be great for the area. But as far as environmentally, there is a lot yet to be seen with that. There are a lot of groups that point a finger of blame and maybe they're right, but at the same time, maybe they're not. There is a lot of testing that has yet to be done that still needs to be done.

As Christiana Peppard observes, scientists anticipate that the risks of the industry may be high, but little research is available to help inform local communities what might be happening to their land, air, and water. "Hydraulic fracturing or 'fracking' raises the biological stakes exponentially, and – more alarming – we do not know enough about what those stakes actually are," says Peppard.¹¹¹ "It surprised me that there was so little systemic work on this," says Robert Jackson. "We don't know much about the fracking."¹¹²

Of course, Peppard admits, such worries may be unfounded. Or they may not be:

¹¹¹ Peppard, "Spewing Forth," 1.

¹¹² Soraghan, 1.

To be sure, the human virtues of ingenuity and technological innovation may eventually assuage such worries. Fears may be proven wrong. Corporations may not go ‘rogue.’ Walls may contain water and toxic chemicals. But the concerns are reasonable, and they may be proven right. Who knows?¹¹³

She says the challenge is how to consider such a situation, with all of its unknowns, *theologically*. And that is the challenge for this synod and the core question of this paper. Now that we have exhibited the ethical conundrums of the gas industry in the synod and the opinions of its members, we must explore how the church might move forward according to Christian principles, and what theological resources are available for the Lutheran congregations as they attend to the question of fracking.



Fig. 9: Fracking Pad (Lycoming County); Source: Nicholas A. Tonelli

¹¹³ Peppard, “Spewing Forth,” 1.

Chapter 3: Lutheran Ecotheological Resources

O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. [...] These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground.

-Psalm 104:24-30

A Lutheran Approach to a Theology of Earth Care:

It is significant that the Upper Susquehanna Synod's resolutions on fracking begin with the following clauses:

“Whereas, God created heaven and earth and everything therein and proclaimed it good (Gen 1:1ff); and God has entrusted humankind with the care of the earth (Gen 2:15); and Whereas, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has adopted several policy statements, “Caring for Creation” (1993) and “Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood” (1999) that call for economic and environment justice, to protect present and future generations, and for economic justice, to consider how our actions affect the ability of all people to provide for their material needs and the needs of their families and communities [...] [we resolve] to establish a task force within the Creation Care Committee charged with [investigating fracking].¹¹⁴

The seven pastors who drafted the resolutions ground their argument in two traditional sources and norms of theology: scripture and the authority of the Church. Yet the bulk of the language about fracking in the resolutions is scientific and sociological, borrowing from the secular discourse on the issue. Accordingly, as I observed the debate on the issue in the assembly hall, I noted a palpable disconnection between the discourse on these first two clauses and the

¹¹⁴ Upper Susquehanna Synod of the ELCA, Resolution on Public Action Regarding Horizontal Slickwater Hydraulic Fracturing; Adopted by the Assembly of the Upper Susquehanna Synod, June 15, 2012. (See Appendix B for full text).

discussion of the issue on the table. Synod representatives who spoke for and against the resolutions rarely used theological language when justifying their points, and few referenced the theological grounding of the resolutions. Admittedly, no one disputed that the opening clauses were an integral part of resolution, not even the dissenters. Rather, the Lutheran pastors and members simply seemed more comfortable with the language of politics and science when addressing the issue publically.

This is not surprising, as the average Christian lacks familiarity with the language of ecotheology. Granted, the concepts of stewardship, creation care, and eco-justice are becoming more common in church rhetoric. However, many do not find the terminology to be second nature to them when discussing such issues. Even general theological language has become less prominent in our increasingly secular and pluralistic society. This rhetorical breach between theological scholarship and everyday discourse within church communities is an obstacle for Christian pastors who are trying to mobilize the church into ecological advocacy. Many in the pews are simply unaware of the wealth of ecotheology at their disposal. They do not recognize that it is designed to clarify how the core of their faith relates to something as seemingly esoteric as horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing.

In this section, I aim to present the ecotheological resources available to this Lutheran synod. There is a growing abundance of ecotheology from many sectors of the Christian faith—far too much literature to cover in one paper. Therefore, I will focus primarily on theologians from the Lutheran faith in this analysis. This is not to encourage a sectarian approach to ecotheology, but rather to demonstrate that even within one particular theological tradition of Christianity, there are many voices devoted to articulating spiritual answers to ecological conundrums like fracking. I focus on these Lutheran voices also out of respect for this synod; I learned through my work with the National Council of Churches that, as a denomination,

Lutherans are famously proud of their unique theological heritage. It is one of the most clearly articulated of the Protestant theologies (grounded in the writings of their founder, Martin Luther).

Traditionally, Protestant theologies have a poor reputation in ecological circles, which is justified by voices like Rev. S.J.M. Eaton, introduced in Chapter 1. As I read his writing on petroleum I wonder how much of this fossil fuel oriented prosperity gospel trickled into Lutheran theology. In Eaton's words about the first petroleum boom in Pennsylvania, we see a version of a stewardship ethics, but also a triumphant Calvinism that views the industrial revolution as a natural extension of Christian vocation. "Men should consider themselves but stewards of Heaven's rich bounty, and the almoners of its gifts. If the great Benefactor entrusts us with much, He will require much at our hands. And it is a most blessed thing to be able to relieve want, to urge onward the great enterprises of the day, and to add our portion to the great Spiritual Temple that the Eternal God is erecting, and that he will, ere long, make beautiful in the earth," he claims.¹¹⁵ In light of figures like Eaton, who are emblematic of Max Weber's famous thesis on the Protestant work ethic and its relationship to the spread of capitalism, a study of the modern Lutheran Church and its theological responses to the ecological and social effects of this economic order is highly relevant.

Though Weber primarily focuses on Calvinist influences, his critique also applies to doctrines such as Luther's "justification by faith alone," which critics say leads Lutheranism to ignore the troubles of this world due to a "preoccupation with redemption and the human-divine relationship."¹¹⁶ Lutherans rarely embraced the same glorifying rhetoric about capitalist wealth, but they sometimes condoned it by their quietism on the subject in public circles. For example, the German Lutheran skepticism of industry in Pennsylvania, outlined in Chapter 1,

¹¹⁵ Eaton, 294-295.

¹¹⁶ Charles Lutz. "Loving My Neighbor in the Whole of God's Creation." *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (March 2003), 2.

did not lead them to publically speak out against the industry. Gilson Walkoenig, a professor of theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, says in an article on Lutheran ecotheology: "Lutheran faith is so idealized, key analysts have claimed, that public political contradictions inevitably drive it inward. Ernst Troeltsch noted that mystical communion with Christ quietly subsisted amid the evident violence of the state. Today, denuded forests, carbon in the atmosphere, toxic waterways, and environmental injustice to the poor crowd a list of concerns labeled 'temporal,' while the evident objective of faith becomes personal access to a heaven separated from conflicted earthly concerns."¹¹⁷ Accordingly, Reinhold Niebuhr, a well-known Lutheran, chastises his fellow Lutherans, declaring, "We cannot build our individual ladders to heaven and leave the total human enterprise unredeemed of its excesses and corruptions."¹¹⁸ The twentieth century's most heroic Lutheran, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, also heavily critiqued this complacency in the Lutheran church in Europe.

Yet, despite this potential (and often realized) inward-focus, Martin Luther, the founder of the Lutheran faith often included creation in his writings. His very first sentence on the Apostles' Creed reads: "I believe God has created me, together with all creatures." God's gift of nature should be read as Scripture, Luther says: "All creation is the most beautiful book or Bible; in it God has described and portrayed himself."¹¹⁹ Moreover, some of the earliest voices of the modern ecotheology movement came from the Lutheran denomination. Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler, considered to be the founder of modern Protestant ecotheology, said in his classic 1961 address to the World Council of Churches assembly in New Delhi, India: "We [Christians] do not have [...] a daring, penetrating, life-affirming Christology for nature." He explains, "It is true [in all Christian traditions] that the imperial vision of Christ as coherent in *ta panta* [Col. 1]

¹¹⁷ Gilson Waldkoenig, "Scenes and Means of Grace." *Dialog* 50, no. 4 (2011): 333.

¹¹⁸ Roger S. Gottlieb. *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future*. Oxford University Press, 2006: 43.

¹¹⁹ Lutz, 1.

has not broken open the powers of grace to diagnose, judge, and heal the ways of human beings as they blasphemously strut about this hurt and threatened world as if they owned it."¹²⁰

Lutheran theologian Paul Santmire carried on Sittler's tradition, writing in the 1990s. In his Christological vision, "The Captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ, cares for the ark of this universe and its eternal destiny." As Santmire elaborates, "He cares for every creature on board, in appropriate ways, and, in turn calls upon the human passengers of this universal vessel to care likewise for the whole vessel and all its creatures, in every appropriate way."¹²¹

But how can we apply both traditional and modern Lutheran theology to the specific topic of natural gas fracking in the Pennsylvania? To fully answer this question, it is necessary to explore the ways in which various Lutheran theologians have approached the traditional categories of Lutheran doctrine and how they have found deep ecological significance by doing so. However, to avoid getting lost in Lutheran ecotheological theory and forgetting the topic and context at hand, I will use the voices of those I interviewed to guide this theological exploration.

Landscapes of Grace: A Lutheran Sacramental Vision of the Earth

When I asked Rev. Nancy Adler, the primary author of the resolutions and a fervent anti-fracking activist, what theological tools she uses to address fracking in her own congregation, she replied:

One of the arguments that I use [focuses on] Lutheran sacraments. For Lutherans, baptism and communion are the pillars of our sacraments. I actually preached on [baptism] recently and I talked about the sacredness of the Susquehanna. And people around here know how important the Susquehanna is. They know what it used to be and what it is now. And they are frustrated and they are angry. But they feel completely powerless to do anything about it. [I tell the congregation,] 'Imagine trying to baptize a baby in fracked water.' That gets to people. 'Imagine trying to grow the wheat for the bread and the grapes for the wine in an area that has been polluted with fracking fluids,' I say. 'It completely disrupts the sacraments,' [I conclude].

¹²⁰ Lutz., 1.

¹²¹ Ibid., 1.

By using the familiar imagery of the sacraments and blending it with the harsh realities of fracking, she shows how powerful these sacraments can be in keeping God relevant and present in this very *material* situation. Rev. Dr. Robin Vogt, the ecotheologian and the local Lutheran seminary, used a similar tactic:

[When addressing fracking] I press that if Christ is really part of creation, is really present in creation, than the earth is really a means of grace, the earth is a sacrament. If you press a little further on that, you feel a pushback from people. I think it could renew our sense of baptism and communion and preaching, if we had more of a creation emphasis, because those [sacraments] are all in creation, they use created elements. Like people.

Many pastors I talked to in the synod about fracking turn first to the long tradition of Lutheran sacraments. Compared to many Protestant denominations, which moved away from the sacramental emphasis of Catholicism, Lutheranism retained its “high church” atmosphere and ritualized worship. Though Luther was angered by the Catholic Church’s abuse of these traditions, he found them in essential to the Christian faith.

A sacramental vision is a critical tool for cultivating an ecological vision, says Lutheran theologian, Cynthia Moe-Loebeda, a professor at Seattle University.¹²² She and other Lutheran ecotheologians argue that the sacraments remind us of the incarnation of Christ – God in matter – and its significance for how we look at this material universe. The Creator, says Luther, is fully present “in a grain, on a grain, over a grain, through a grain, within and without, and that, although it is a single Majesty, it nevertheless is entirely in each grain separately.”¹²³ Lutheran theologian Charles Lutz says Luther believed that “in reflecting on the mystery of Holy Communion, [...] if we truly understood the growth miracle of a kernel of wheat, we would die of wonder!”¹²⁴ Moe-Loebeda continues:

¹²² Cynthia Moe-Loebeda. “God ‘Flowing and Pouring into...All Things’.” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 3, no. 12 (December 2003): 1-4.

¹²³ Lutz, 1.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

Luther's theology of God indwelling creation hints at another source of moral power. Luther insisted that 'the power of God [...] must be essentially present in all places even in the tiniest leaf.' God 'is in and through all creatures, in all their parts and places, so that the world is full of God and [God] fills all.' God as boundless, justice-seeking love coursing through creation suggests that all creatures and Earth itself may offer creative, saving, sustaining power toward creation's flourishing. To think theologically about the moral agency that flows from God inhabiting 'every little seed' and 'all creatures' is to struggle for and with a concept that barely exists in western Protestant ethics. Luther's indwelling God opens that door theologically.¹²⁵

Or, in terms of this case study, the "moral agency that flows from God" inhabiting every drop of water in the Susquehanna River Basin.

This immanence, like Christ's incarnation, is the ultimate story of resilience, a reflection of God's covenant to never abandon the earthly world (even when we mortal beings rebel against him), according to Lutheran ecotheologian Rev. Dr. Waldkoenig. The sacraments, therefore, represent more than just a recognition that God cares for this earth. They are symbolic of the divine grace and forgiveness.¹²⁶ The Augsburg Confession describes word and sacrament as the "means of grace;" through the sacraments and word, Christ grace is given to us freely. "By calling word and sacraments means of grace, we are saying: 'This is how and where grace happens,'" explains Kathryn A. Kleinhans in a tutorial on Lutheran theology administered by the ELCA.¹²⁷ Waldkoenig particularly focuses on the *where*, arguing that means of grace are integrally linked with "scenes of grace," or the natural settings in which our Christian sacraments occur: "For many Christians, Christ's persistence in earthly things is encountered

¹²⁵ Moe-Loebeda, 3.

¹²⁶ Waldkoenig, 328.

¹²⁷ Kathryn A. Kleinhans. "Culture or Confession?" *The Lutheran*, Lutheranism 101 (n.d.): 3-4.

through words and rituals, called the means of grace, which happen with earthly elements. Plain water from the earth's watersheds is united with the Word in baptism. Wine grown from the soil and wheat baked in fire join the Word in communion. Breath borrowed from the winds proclaims the living Word within the soundscape of this world. Those practices draw their elements from natural ecosystems and participate in them."¹²⁸ He claims that the association of natural scenes of grace with means of grace can be "a lively way to revisit some important teachings about Christ's presence in creation that sometimes have been obscured in personalized and disembodied versions of faith."¹²⁹

Moreover, in a situation where an industry like shale gas extraction threatens the health of watersheds, ecosystems, and human communities, sacraments can be a profound source of *healing*. Says Moe-Loebeda, "It is an ancient faith claim – that God's love in Christ is 'flowing and pouring into all things,' and there offers creating, saving, and sustaining power for the healing of a broken world."¹³⁰ In a world in which the economic forces that degrade the earth seem too large to topple, sacrament can yield faith that God is more powerful than any worldly force and can renew the very fabric of the universe through Christ: "The church today is called to rekindle that ancient faith claim, to breathe and live in the promise that indeed this God is incarnate in us – mud creatures of the earth, gathered to praise God and 'participate in God's mission' – and, in us, hungering and hastening towards the restoration of this precious and brutalized world. This vision breaths power to open our hearts and mind to the 'data of despair' – including our implication in ecological and economic violence."¹³¹

Even when the forces of destruction and decay seem dominant, Lutheran sacrament calls its followers to trust that God cares deeply for our landscapes, our bodies, and earth

¹²⁸ Waldkoenig, 328.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 328.

¹³⁰ Moe-Loebeda in Marit Trelstad. *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*. Fortress Press, 2006., 181-192.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 181-192.

systems and that the Holy Spirit continues to work in all of these “scene of grace.” Borrowing the language of process theology, Waldkoenig asserts, “A triune God comes into focus when animating spirit, ongoing creativity, and once-for-all redemption emerge together.”¹³²



Fig. 10: Susquehanna River near Sunbury (Northumberland County); Source: Lena Connor

Saints and Sinners: Overcoming the Powers of Evil

But those “scenes of grace” can be interrupted by human error, when we harm each other or the ecosystems that we live in out of greed, blindness, and apathy. Theologians label this force that separates us from God, “evil.” Throughout my interviews, the theme of evil – in association with industrial development – was commonly invoked by those against the fracking. As Rev. Adler shares:

When I went up to the state forest and its beautiful, [...] forest. And then you see this awful tower. And everything is dead for acres. I felt like I was standing at a cross. I felt like I was standing in the presence of evil. I’ve never felt like that before. It felt crushing

¹³² Waldkoenig, 330.

to me. And to think of that multiplied across the state. If I do nothing, then I'm complicit with the powers. I have to do something. I have to do something. And I have to trust God.

As she spoke of the injustices that she saw as being perpetuated by the gas boom – the political corruption, the health effects, the water and air pollution, the addiction to fossil fuels, the displacement of rural and poor people – tears came to her eyes. She continues:

There's a spirit of evil at work in all of this that seeks only its own perpetuation at the cost of anyone that gets in its way. It's like the Matrix [...] that sees only human beings only as feeders for itself. And does not see you as a person, it only sees how it may use you. How do you get people to swallow that pill and have the scales fall away from their eyes, so that they can see, "Wow, I'm being used..." So that even people in government, where good people who are doing awful things, can realize this fact. C.S. Lewis has a quote: "The best thing that the devil can do is convince you that he does not exist."

In so arguing, she articulates an agent of this systemic evil, an active force that is channeling our seemingly benign desires for the comforts and prosperity of American lifestyle into something corrosive and violent against marginalized ecosystems and people.

Although she feels comfortable using the traditional language of the devil, other Lutheran theologians shy away from this symbolism (fearing dualism between God and Satan) and locate evil not in the supernatural but in human failure, or “the fall.” Luther argued that Christians were “simultaneously saint and sinner,” and redefined a saint as a forgiven sinner, rather than a perfected human. This was to emphasize that grace comes from God alone, and not through religious behavior. He famously directed Christians to “sin boldly” with faith that Christ is victorious.¹³³ This statement has been interpreted problematically throughout the history of Lutheranism to mean that our actions on earth have little impact on our eternal fate. Seminarian Rev. Dr. Vogt says that this mentality is embedded in conservative Lutheran reactions to fracking and is manifest in a “dispensationalist kind of theology” that believes phenomena like fracking, climate change, and mass extinction, are all part of God’s plan for the earth (even a sign of a second coming). He thinks that such thinking has crept into Lutheran

¹³³ Klienmans, 4.

theology from other fundamentalist sects of Protestantism, and is far from reflective of true Lutheran theology.

Rev. Tom Schumann, who has pastored churches throughout the synod, says that in conversations about fracking with other synod pastors during a ministerium meeting in Watson Town (in Northumberland County), said the pastors divided into two camps, based on their analysis of the concept of humans' "dominion" over the earth. Rev. Ruth Erikson, a synod leader based in Lewisburg (in Union County), says that while the majority of Lutheran pastors in the synod resist such fundamentalist thinking, she has encountered a few that engage in it:

I can think of the statements of two Lutheran pastors in the synod last year. One of them said that they don't worry about fracking because God is in control and everything is going to be all right and God promised never to destroy the earth again. And I want to beat my head against the wall and say, 'Really? Where is your theological background for that? I mean, there is something about hoping and trusting in God and there is also something in being a part of that, of what God has promised. You can't just toss it all up in the air.'

Rev. Erikson explains that when the other pastors expressed this opinion, she wanted to emphasize to them that salvation is not only about being in a category of "saved" or "unsaved" as some Evangelicals believe, but that salvation is also about bringing the Kingdom of God to earth in all of its wholeness. We are tasked with being hands that work toward the salvation of the whole world, including the environment. Moreover, we are instructed to not sin and in so doing, distance ourselves and the world from this kingdom.

Continuing with this theme, Lutheran biblical scholar, Terence Fretheim, of Lutheran Seminary at St. Paul, argues that "God's actions are not fixed for every conceivable future moment; they will be shaped to some extent by the actions of the creatures (see, e.g., Jer. 22:1-5)."¹³⁴ In the Hebrew Bible, God's sovereignty should not be understood as "absolute divine control," but as a sovereignty that bequeaths agency to the created for the "sake of a

¹³⁴ Terence E. Fretheim. *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*. Abingdon Press, 2010:74.

relationship of integrity.” But there is a risk in this gift, as the misuse of that power is humans’ perennial difficulty, the wedge that we drive between God and creation. Fretheim claims, “While God will finally bring that new heaven and earth into being, what the creatures, especially human beings, do between now and that certain future will make a difference with respect to the shape of that future.”¹³⁵ Rev. Jim Erikson, Rev. Ruth Erikson’s husband, phrases it this way:

And we pray in the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven.’ So that’s a prayer that the way God intends for things to be, in Heaven or eternity or whatever you want to call it, that’s the way he intends for things to be here now on earth. And we can never reach perfection until the resurrection and the new creation, but that’s a sign for us. That’s eschatological sign. The way things will be, that’s a promise that we can live by. For the way things can be.

His wife finishes his thought, reiterating that this promise is not license for apathy about the world, but rather an invitation to work towards this renewal, to help protect the land for future generations, experiencing God working with us in healing and creative love.

Rev. Ruth Erikson elaborates on her point, saying that Luther’s call to “sin boldly” means that you have to step out in faith with courage, to act with ethical discernment, but also to recognize your own fallibility as a human. Or, in other words, making decisions in situations like fracking is complex because we have tunnel vision, constrained by our worldly blinders. So our ethical judgments, even when well-intended, will not be perfect. Moe-Loebeda says we have to actively wrestle with these blinders, particularly in wealthy communities. As she remarks, “Luther’s paradoxical moral anthropology speaks directly to the heart of life for economically privileged people.” She quotes Luther’s assertion that collectively, we are “selves curved in on ourselves.” We may aim to infuse our lives with “justice-making, self-honoring love” and avoid “exploiting neighbor or Earth.” But here we are, she says, “a society so

¹³⁵ Fretheim, 76.

addicted to our economic ways that we close our eyes to the death and destruction required to sustain them.”¹³⁶

Wendell Berry, speaking as an agrarian philosopher, says that the problem of modern living in an industrial society is that we are all so hopelessly guilty. “It seems as if industrial humanity has brought about phase two of original sin. We are all now complicit in the murder of creation. We certainly do know how to apply better measures to our conduct and our work. We know how to do far better than we are doing. But we don’t know how to extricate ourselves from our complicity very surely or very soon,” he observes.¹³⁷ Or in the words of ecotheologian Larry Rasmussen, of Union Seminary, “Nature is now in the hands of its most aggressive species.”¹³⁸

This awareness of the flaws of our species – our capacity for the annihilation of life – is often a painful realization, particularly because we often engage in this behavior unknowingly. This “banality of evil,” as political theorist Hannah Arendt would call it, is often obscured in what we think of as daily economic needs. The point of religion, often, is to unveil this evil and then conquer it with submission to God. Santmire says that in scripture, especially the Psalms and Genesis, even after the authors describe the grandeur of creation and humanity, we see “a sobering [allusion to] human malfeasance” towards nature [Gen 1:35].¹³⁹ Joseph Sittler wrote in 1953, “Nature can be subsumed under man.” He argues that evil blinds humans to relationship with nature: “Materially, that is, she is reduced to a resource for his needs; spiritually she is envisioned as only an unreplying theater for his proud and pathetic life.”¹⁴⁰ Submission to God,

¹³⁶ Moe-Loebeda, “God ‘Flowing...,’” 4.

¹³⁷ Berry, 136.

¹³⁸ Larry Rasmussen. “Doing Our First Works Over.” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 9, no. 4 (April 2009): 4.

¹³⁹ H. Paul Santmire. “Partnership with Nature According to the Scriptures: Beyond the Theology of Stewardship.” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* 3, no. 12 (December 2003): 1-11.

¹⁴⁰ Joseph Sittler, Steven Bouma-Prediger, and Peter W. Bakken. *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*. W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2000: 27.

therefore requires a transformation of this relationship, a liberation of nature and humanity from sin.

In my interviews with several pastors oppose fracking, particularly those who had authored the synod's resolutions, I observed that they use a theological language that is very similar to the liberation ecotheology that I had witnessed in my ethnographic research of Catholics and bauxite mining in Brazil. They frame the issue of fracking as the capitalist logic exploiting the earth and the poor of the community, a force that was taking advantage of the impoverished region and exploiting fears about the future of rural communities in the modern age. In essence, the pastors locate much of the sin surrounding the industry in economic hierarchies. They approach the issue much like the Brazilian people I interviewed approach bauxite mining. And the ecologically minded Lutherans articulated a theology that was quite similar to Leonardo Boff or other well-known Brazilian ecotheologians. This similarity points to a global application and translation of ecotheology between people faced with similar extractive industries and ecological disruption.

Rev. Adler even referenced the ecofeminist work of the Brazilian theologian, Ivone Gebara. (Rev. Adler herself is writing her Ph.D. dissertation on ecofeminist theology and its homiletic applications in American churches and if you note the gendered language of Sittler's statement above, you will note that this ecofeminist approach is not foreign to Lutheran ecotheology.) Describing the abuse she sees emanating from the natural gas industry's presence in the area, Rev. Adler says:

I very much see it as a rape. That the earth is like a woman. And the mentality is: 'We can come in there and we can do whatever we want to her, and she's going to be fine. We'll use her and suck out her resources, and sometimes we'll kill her.' [...] I'm not just going to roll over and let them do that to me and my children. I'm putting up a fight.

Though she is careful not to demonize individuals involved in the fracking, particularly not local employees of the industry, it is clear that the pastor sees this battle against fracking as a battle against the forces of evil.

The Women at Jesus' Feet: The Theology of the Cross

It is the ecofeminist vision of Rev. Adler that brings us to another aspect of Lutheran theology that useful in addressing the daunting systems that are leading to ecological destruction. As Rev. Adler explains, the cross is where Lutherans must turn to truly grapple with an overwhelmingly complex and mammoth issue like fracking:

I've had serious bouts of depression this year. When I realize the enormity of this problem. And it's like, the deeper you go down into the rabbit hole and you start doing research into the ways that the oil and gas industry, the fossil fuels industry, has manipulated this country, and really the whole global system. [...] It has a utilitarian view of human being and nature. It sometimes sends me into tailspin. I feel like I'm at the foot of the cross and watching an eco-crucifixion. The only thing that keeps me going is my faith, where I look at the story of the women, who were faithfully at the foot of the cross. I'm an ecofeminist, so my work is informed by an understanding that the oppression of the earth and the oppression of women are conjoined.

She explains that it is the Lutheran theology of cross that helps her to make sense of her role in addressing fracking and all of the world's interlinked ecological dilemmas. She explicates this piece of Lutheran theology and describes how it ties into her current situation:

And Lutherans have what's called a 'theology of the cross.' It's the opposite of the 'theology of glory'. The 'theology of glory' says that our God is great, and magnificent and wonderful. And the evidence of that is how successful I am, or how much faith I have, or how strong my church is. You know, it's how good we are reflects how good God is. Whereas the Lutheran theology of the cross says God is found in the least expected place: On the cross. Dead. No hope. That's where God is. Because the resurrection that comes out of that transforms everything that is death giving and just turns it inside out and flips it around and [here is] this amazing surprise. So, instead of chasing after the things that human beings think are going to get us what we want, we are called to go to those apparently God-forsaken places and people, because that's where Jesus is. Jesus said in Mt. 25: 'Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.' So I look at the least of these in this situation and I see it as every animal and plant on that previously protected site in the state forest that has been clear-cut. Who is speaking for them? That's our job is to speak for that community and say that they were meant to be protected and what you're doing is a kind of genocide. To the woman who watched her husband sign this lease and now their well is contaminated, and their children have sores and now she has

headaches that she cannot explain and her horses are dying. And her dog's hair is falling out. And she's completely powerless. They can't sell their land, because no one wants to buy it. They can't move, because they don't have any money.

Rev. Adler demonstrates how a pastor can translate an ancient doctrine into vivid stories, to transpose the face of a suffering Christ onto the women, children, animals, and plants she describes. The Lutheran theology of the cross is a very specific doctrine that warns against a “theology of glory” that abstracts God from his action in history, as Kleinhas reiterates. “A theology of glory looks up and says, ‘God’s in heaven and all’s well with the world,’” Kleinhas explains. In contrast, a Lutheran theology of the cross, “keeps its feet firmly planted on our broken Earth and says, ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to God.’”¹⁴¹ God chooses to put aside divine characteristics and suffered from human abuse. “Christians confess that God’s saving power works precisely through such weakness (1 Cor. 1:23-25, 2 Cor. 12:9),” Kleinhas concludes.¹⁴²

This does not mean that such suffering is what every creature should aspire to – far from it. Rather, as Moe Loebeda notes:

God is drawn into brokenness in this world – including the complicity of some people with economic ways that exploit others – and there God becomes lifesaving power incarnate. Luther's theology of the cross and of Christ indwelling and empowering the believing community, together, render the promise without which, to open one's eyes to the data of despair might be to drown in it. That ‘Christ [...] fills all things’ and is present particularly in sites of suffering enables us to acknowledge soul-searing economic brutalities that must be faced if we are to resist neo-liberal economic globalization, and convert to

¹⁴¹ Kleinhas, 4.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.

economic ways that enable just and sustainable communities and Earth community for generations to come.¹⁴³

This theology of the cross has been a balm to Lutherans throughout history during dark times. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, while writing from his cell in a Nazi prison, facing the tyrannies of this age, said “May God in his mercy lead us through these times; but above all, may he lead us to himself.”¹⁴⁴ To Bonhoeffer, only by living fully in the world, with all its death and pain, can one learn to have faith. In doing so “we throw ourselves completely in the arms of God, taking seriously, not our own sufferings, but those of God in the world – watching with Christ in Gethsemane.”¹⁴⁵ We watch for renewal in the midst of suffering.

But the theology of the cross encompasses more than just the events of Good Friday, for after death came Christ’s resurrection, the most magnificent of renewals according to Christian tradition. Lutherans believe, as most Christians do, that it is the Easter renewal – a *cosmic* renewal – that gives Christians faith that death is far from victorious. God can bring life back into the bleakest of denuded landscapes, to the most toxic of rivers, to the most cancerous of bodies. According to Waldkoenig, the work of Christ “attests to and establishes the reliable salvation of God in the midst of it all.”¹⁴⁶ God is in midst of the well pad, the midst of the tainted river, and in midst of the house of the unemployed woman who needs a job – if we are attuned and open to the Spirit’s redemptive presence. “The creative instability in scenes of grace evokes a God beyond fathoming; but with the means of grace, creative instability frames and heightens the sufficiency of saving grace in Christ.”¹⁴⁷ It is this God that Rev. Adler calls upon for strength in the face of fracking, on behalf of the distressed woman and the distressed woodland.

¹⁴³ Moe-Loebeda, “God ‘Flowing...,” 4.

¹⁴⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Letters and Papers from Prison: Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*. Fortress Press, 2010: 370.

¹⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, 369.

¹⁴⁶ Waldkoenig, 333.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 333.



Fig. 11: Lutheran Church in Milton (Union County); Source: Lena Connor

A Grounded Vocation: A Call to Be in Community with Creation

But the Bible is clear that Christians do not have to tackle this quest alone, but rather should do it as a group of believers, supporting each other along the way. Rev. Dr. Vogt comments that in his work with ecology and on fracking in the Pennsylvania Lutheran community, one of the convictions that he emphasizes most strongly is that sound ecotheology adds a deeper layer to an understanding of Christian fellowship and community. Even doubting pastors realize that creation could be useful in ministry, he says:

We're getting down to the point where people in the church are even questioning the point of gathering together to worship. Creation theology helps explain why it is important that we gather in community. Place, relationship, community. The earth as a sacrament informs why community is a sacrament. Ecotheology is important as we go ahead, because it's community theology.

The detachment in the churches, he explains, stems from a modern, heaven-centric version of Protestant religious life that focuses so intently on the individual – the self – and the one-on-one relationship with God, that even human community seems less than vital. This certainly affects how people in the synod often see the environment’s role in religious ethics:

Another thing is that people say, “Oh yeah, the environment, that’s part of ethics: good works and how we should live while we’re here. But then we’re going to go away to leave and [heaven’s] another place.” There is this divide. “Ethics is about earthly things, but that’s the third quarter. At the end of the fourth quarter, we’re all going to graduate to a different place,” [some say]. So, we’re working against that. We’re trying to draw it back together.

Many religious and secular theorists see our alienation from one another as integrally linked with our alienation from the natural systems we inhabit. For Lutz, it signifies a misunderstanding of our relationship with God and a misinterpretation of our vocation according to the theological concept of *imago Dei*, being made in the image of God. As he elucidates, “Being in the image of God lets us use the soil. It does not justify our using up the soil. Being in God’s image lets us cut trees for building material and fuel. But it requires that we routinely plant new trees and leave alone trees that protect life-giving soil from erosion. Being in God’s image means we see God’s gifts in the rest of nature as more than commodities in a global market. These gifts are, in a profound way, flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone.”¹⁴⁸ Santmire says that God is in partnership with us (as traditional stewardship models imply), but God is also in partnership with nature and humans with nature likewise. It is a triangular relationship of interdependence.¹⁴⁹

Lutheran ecotheology also asserts that this earth community perspective is deepened by an awareness of the New Testament call for community. When asked what theological techniques she uses to approach the ecotheology of fracking in her church, Rev. Adler replied:

¹⁴⁸ Lutz, 3.

¹⁴⁹ Santmire, 10.

[I use] Jesus' teaching of who is my neighbor. That our neighbor is not just our human neighbor, but it is the river and it is the animals and it is the plants and it is the whole ecosystem, and we are called to speak for it, to care for it, to learn from it.

Lutherans, and all Christians, profess that they believe in a cosmic Christ, “the firstborn of all creation,” in whom and for whom “all things in heaven and earth were created,” and in whom “all things hold together” (Col 1:15-20). By doing so, Christians are affirming that community in Christ is inclusive of all created beings.

That inclusiveness means that the relationship between human, non-humans, and the elements of the earth is “important to the persistence of that community, the handing on of traditions, and the maintenance of social bonds,” Waldkoenig argues. He says that the wise voices of people like Wes Jackson and Wendell Berry, who refuse to let modern life obscure these relational ties, “(carve) a space for the cultivation of scenes of grace in which care and community shape places.”¹⁵⁰ Berry himself suggests that “not just humans but all creatures live by participating in the life of God, by partaking of His spirit and breathing His breath.” He connects this participation in God’s eternal life as the grounding of Jesus’ call to act in community with our neighbors: “And so the Samaritan reaches out in love to help his enemy, breaking all customary boundaries, because he has clearly seen in his enemy not only a neighbor, not only a fellow human being or a fellow creature, but a fellow sharer in the life of God.”¹⁵¹

Just so, in the case of fracking and many other cases of ecological degradation, the fate of our human and non-human neighbors integrally linked. It is not a choice between reaching out to our human neighbor or our non-human neighbors. This thinking originates in a false, competitive duality between the needs of humanity and the needs of the rest of creation. Nonetheless, knowing when and how to attend to human and non-human neighbors is a

¹⁵⁰ Waldkoenig, 332.

¹⁵¹ Berry, 136.

difficult task, says Lutz. He concludes, “The biblical imperative is that we always tilt toward those who are poor: orphans and widows, landless ones, the exiles in our midst. And it is true, in rich and poor countries alike, that environmental degradation hurts first and worst those who are the most vulnerable economically. And so economic justice and environmental justice always walk together.”¹⁵² Faith enables us to have an awareness of this connection, to have the vision to see the ramifications of our actions on our surrounding community. It is the loving knowledge of place, and all the created beings it contains, that Waldkoenig argues is integral to seeing the work of the Holy Spirit on this earth: “Time and again, God teaches humanity to sense their location and their proximity to God’s presence, from the edge of the Jabbok to Elijah’s cave, and on to the cross of Christ.”¹⁵³

The Economy of Grace: What Does God Value?

Part of this attention to community and to its placement requires an altered understanding of economy, the rules of our collective household. If the “earth is the Lord’s” as the Psalms say, and we are part of a web of created beings meant to be in relationship with each other, then the logic of economics to Christians is very different from how our culture currently structures our economy. The goals are quite different – abundance of life versus abundance of capital. During my interviews with pastors and lay members, the tension between the doctrines of Christianity and capitalism was evident, but some church members I spoke to want them to be interchangeable (i.e. the growth of the local economy was equal to the greatest good for God’s people). I am sympathetic to this position. For in our culture, the language of economic growth has priority over all other rhetoric in our political discourse. Therefore, extricating Christian value from this hegemonic system of material value is extremely difficult. Some I interviewed do not see fracking as a religious issue, citing that it is first and foremost an

¹⁵² Lutz, 4.

¹⁵³ Waldkoenig, 332.

economic issue. The fact that economics and religion are thought to be separate realms is significant.

When I asked Rev. Adler to respond to these statements, she rose to the challenge, addressing a hypothetical church member:

So let's talk about economics. What is it you need? What is the myth that you've been told that says you have to stockpile all of this stuff? What is that about? Because underneath that, there's a fear. It's fear of death. It's fear of loss. Fear of loss of the American way of life. Why is it that fracking is the answer? Because we cannot conceive of a lifestyle where our consumption is diminished and we're satisfied with fewer lights, or fewer refrigerators, or less technology? And what would it look like to unplug? What is that living water, what is that bread of life? What is it that God is offering us that at the end of the day, no amount of money can buy for you? What is it? And why is that we are so easily following into that trap? How is your fear being manipulated so that you can be used?

She states that Lutheran pastors should be unafraid to address economic ethics and to ask these hard questions, as the Bible is full of guidelines for such decision-making:

What subject did Jesus talk about more than any other topic in the Bible? Money! "Where your treasure is, your heart will be also," [he said]. Where do you put your money? Wherever you put your money, that's what you're worshipping. So, if we are putting our faith in technology, fracking, sex... you know whatever our money is going to, that's our god. That's what we're worshipping.

She implies that while pastors must go about this task with patient love, they must also not kowtow to the bullying of politicians and business leaders that claim primary authority in defining what the economic "good" is for a community. For our system of empirical economics is not value neutral, despite its guise. It must be contained within an ethical system of care, or greed will take its natural course.

Natural gas is particularly emblematic of the roots of our economic paradigm. As Rasmussen argues, "Fossil fuels let us bypass the rhythms and requirements of nature that pre-industrial populations had to observe season in and season out." Our initial discovery of this stored energy was the spark to a great transformation. "We forgot that every human economy is always and everywhere utterly a dependent part of the nature's economy. Earth's economy is

substructure, the human economy is superstructure. The former must be matched to the latter, or big trouble ensues," he warns.¹⁵⁴ The political, ecological, and sociological snares that our fossil-fuel dependence has entangled us in are this trouble.

Historically, cultures that call themselves Christian were at the forefront of this development; followers of Christ forgot that faith in man-made material systems leads to psychological and physical dependence on worldly structures that are much less stable than God's support systems. Lutheran theologian Jefferson Shriver, of Lutheran World Relief, points out: "Perhaps one of our greatest challenges is to look honestly at the critical connections between the natural capital we own with God and the other forms of capital we have created for ourselves. If secular wisdom would lead us toward technological 'capital' where social and economic capital has failed, the wisdom of faith would turn us instead toward creation, toward the environment. To see correctly, and to do what is necessary, now more than ever, is to begin to bring healing to a broken relationship between people and the land."¹⁵⁵ In light of Shriver's analysis, the idea that we can find a technological fix (namely horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing) to our economic and energy dilemmas is problematic. Nonetheless, currently both candidates for President of the United States push fracking with religious zeal.

According to Martin Luther, "Riches are the most insignificant things on earth, the smallest gift that God can give a person. [...] (W)hat are they in comparison with even the physical endowments and beauty? [...] And yet we act as if this were not so!" And to showcase what is now my favorite Luther quote, "This is why our Lord God generally gives riches to crude asses to whom nothing else is given,"¹⁵⁶ Rev. Bernhard Engel commented that economic rhetoric surrounding the shale gas boom reminded him of Luther's statements on money:

¹⁵⁴ Rasmussen, 4.

¹⁵⁵ Jefferson Shriver. "Healthy Planet, Healthy Communities." *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (May 2003): 3.

¹⁵⁶ James B., Martin-Schramm and Robert L. Stivers. *Christian Environmental Ethics: a Case Method Approach*. Orbis Books, 2003: 74.

Luther himself was very critical of the high finance industry. If you're going to quote Luther on bankers, it's just a joy in itself. He saw the impact of how certain rich people took advantage of common men who worked hard to make a living. And that was his beef with Rome, that Rome took the money away from the disadvantaged. So there is certainly something in Lutheran ethics that is against accumulating too much wealth and forgetting the plight of the poor – leaving the common man behind.

Moe-Loebeda remarks that “Luther's economic ethics defied the emerging capitalism of his context.” He had strict norms against usury, profit accumulation, unregulated commerce, or price inflation. Luther connected his economic ethics to his Eucharistic theology, saying that in past times, when the sacrament was practiced fully, “taught to understand this fellowship so well, that they even gathered food and material goods in the church, and [...] distributed among those who were in need.” Even in his time in the early 16th century, before capitalism came into full fruition, Luther thought that “this has all disappeared, and now there remain only the many masses and the many who receive this sacrament without in the least understanding or practicing what it signifies. [...] They will not help the poor [or] intercede for others.”¹⁵⁷

While it is all well and good for Luther and his modern theological followers to profess high ideals about economic practice, implementing this alternate approach in the average Lutheran church in rural Pennsylvania is no easy feat. This is particularly true in an area like in the Upper Susquehanna Synod, where many are just trying to put food on the table and have little time or energy to set off on any radical economic experiments, they say. Most are not making the big decisions about fracking. Many feel impotent in the face of the energy industry's economic clout and political power, and accept the inevitability of the shale gas boom. How then reach out to and galvanize these congregants is our question.

¹⁵⁷ Moe-Loebeda, “God ‘Flowing...,” 1-2.

More specifically, how do church leaders theologically inspire such church members to stand up to such a large industrial endeavor and demand a more equitable economic prioritization? I asked this question to Rev. Dr. Vogt and he gave me the following answers:

My big emphasis is that God does care that you're here. Because the message from the industry is that you're in the way. And the message from the state is that you're a liability because you're in the way. You're expensive, you're a mouth to feed. Now everybody is avoiding that because our culture says that it's shame if you're in need. It's power if you have the power to make other people in need. [It's under the surface] but there is this strong message that says, "You're nothing, and when you get blown away [by the fracking], no one will care." So my emphasis is that God cares that you are here and God loves you where you are. And Christ is here with you.

He asserts that a pastor should not start any sermon or speech with right and wrong. She first has to establish value and make congregants feel valuable. In an Aristotelian sense, in teaching, you have to start with your pupils where they are, not where you want them to be. Rev. Dr. Vogt continues:

And then from there, you can say, 'Well, if you're valuable it would be wrong to hurt you, and equally wrong to hurt you're neighbor. It would be wrong to ruin your home. It would be wrong to ruin your ecosystem that is more than just what sustains you, it's your community. We belong together.'

He says that of all the approaches he's taken on the issue of fracking, this has been most effective in convincing congregants to take action on the issue publically.

But Rev. Dr. Vogt also commented that the area has historical resources that can be tapped into aid in this task. As outlined in Chapter 1, Lutherans in Pennsylvania have a tradition of valuing the land and honoring faith communities that are rooted in simple living. Mrs. Loft said that when she listens to Rev. Adler's sermons on caring for the earth, she thinks of her father, who embraces this ethic throughout his life:

I think [Creation care] was always part of my life. I grew up on a small farm and my Dad loved the earth. Nature was part of life. He grew up an Appalachian hill guy. He would take us for walks and to pick berries and talk about the trees. So, being connected to the earth has always been a part of my being. My Dad was a super, super Christian and very faithful. He was a humble, quiet man, but very faithful. And he cherished nature and the earth and also his faith was so important to him. So that gave me the feeling that this was

God's creation. And I know that my Dad would want us to be taking care of it and from a God's Creation point of view.

It is these stories that pastors should highlight to show the synod that ecotheology is not a new-fangled academic invention, but rather is an articulation of an ancient and core premise of Christianity.

Pastors must highlight that with the fracking issue, the “earth” that synod members are caring for is not some generalized, global ecosystem that is sometimes difficult to personalize, but is rather the very land their ancestors have lived on for centuries, Rev. Dr. Vogt argues. The very streams, woodlands, and farmlands that have housed their faith community. As Rev. Schumann expresses:

There is a theological piece [to fracking]. What we do to the ground, what we do to the water supply. All of that is a reflection on how we value each other. And how we value the space that we call home.

The synod's response to fracking can be a way of showing gratitude to God for the land they live on, for the ecosystems that have nourished them for generations.

The Prophetic Voice: Speaking Truth to Power

Just as Wendell Berry challenges us to make love an economic practice, Joseph Sittler urges us to remember that the key for living out a life of grace and gratitude is remembering that use of resources must be grounded in love, not greed. “The problem is not a material problem, for man is in it, and he complicates every problem. [...] For as man confronts the marvelous richness of the earth he can use these riches or abuse them. Which of these he chooses is a matter not soluble by mere planning. For there will never be enough for both love and lust!” he asserts.¹⁵⁸ Berry predicts that we will be exploring how to achieve this task of “love

¹⁵⁸ Sittler, 30.

not lust” for a long time to come. In fact, it is the perennial task of human vocation. He is skeptical of people who think that they have all the answers.¹⁵⁹

For theological solutions are in danger of becoming doctrinal and intolerant if they are not cognizant of cultural context and compassionate about local needs and struggles. This is why there is great potential for a local church organization, like the Upper Susquehanna Synod, to be able to guide its congregations to local solutions to an issue like fracking. In our interview, Rev. Dr. Vogt challenged the Lutherans of the synod to become more proactive in applying their theology to worldly contexts, to avoid placing the theology on a shelf and then “sitting on their hands” in apprehension, apathy, or fear.

Rev Adler concludes that it is a question of the prophetic role of the church:

The church has to be a voice that speaks truth to power. And traditionally, the Lutheran church has not done great job with that. Again, witness Nazi Germany, where most Lutheran pastors were cogs in the Nazi machine [or passive and apathetic]. Except Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Thank goodness for Bonhoeffer! And Bonhoeffer actually had a strong ecological theology, which I discovered in my research.

Indeed, Bonhoeffer had a similar call to action: “The church must come out of its stagnation. We must move out again into the open air of intellectual discussion with the world, and risk saying controversial things, if we are to get down to the serious problems of life.”¹⁶⁰ Controversy is certainly something that the leaders of this synod fear, and for good reason, as other recent controversies have led to tension and conflict within their church. In the next chapter, we will address the feasibility and obstacles facing the Upper Susquehanna Synod in their task to engage in public theology and address this highly fractious issue. But for now, we shall end with Bonhoeffer’s poetic words of encouragement for people of faith facing large challenges – words he wrote even in the depths of darkness: “Rejoice and proclaim/ Faithfulness and right/

¹⁵⁹ Berry, 137.

¹⁶⁰ Bonhoeffer, 378.

For a new race!/ Heaven, reconcile/ The sons of earth/ To peace and beauty./ Earth, flourish:/
Man, become free,/ Be free!"¹⁶¹

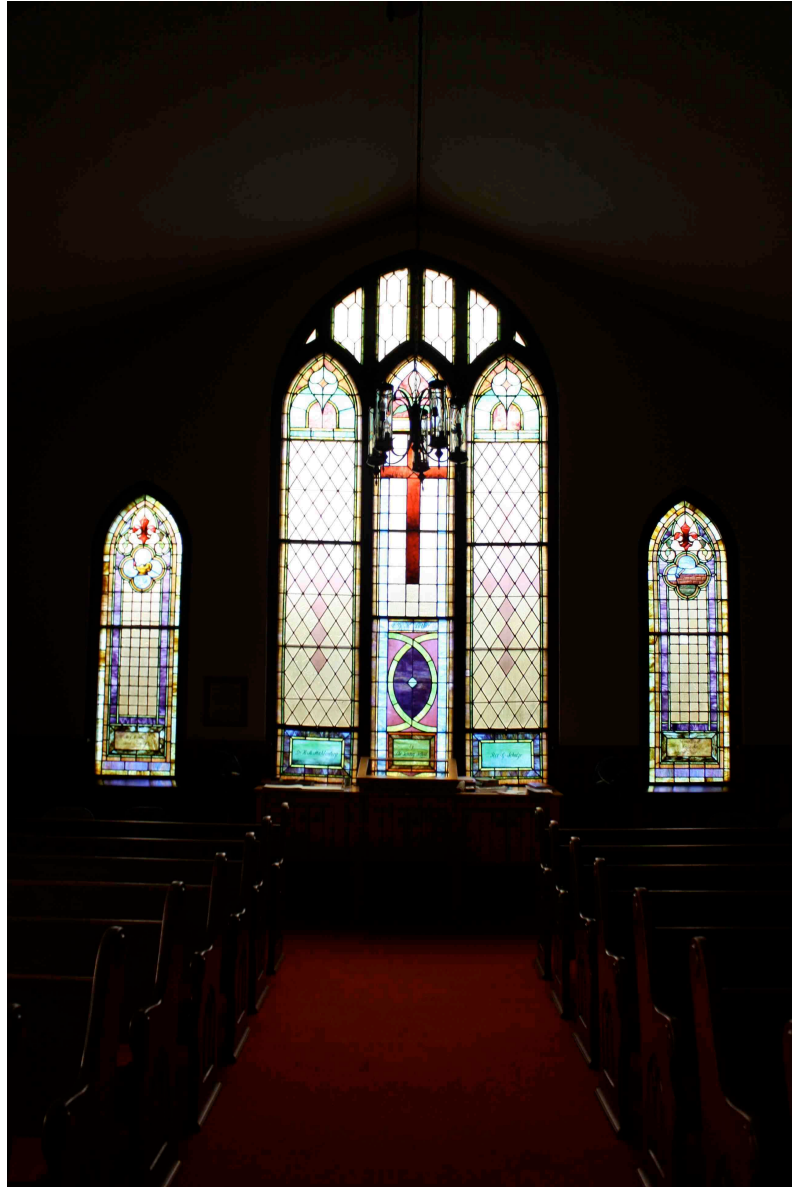


Fig. 12: Stained Glass Windows of Lutheran Church in Cogan Station (Lycoming County); Source: Lena Connor

¹⁶¹ "Night Voices in Tegel," in *Ibid.*, 352.

Chapter 4: The Role of the Church in the Fracking Controversy

“For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

-Ephesians 1:9-10

Ecotheology Applied in the Synod:

After reviewing these theories about how this Lutheran synod might approach fracking theologically, we must now turn to how Lutherans might translate this academic idealism into practice in their churches and communities. As Lutheran ecotheologian Peter W. Bakken says, quoting Joseph Sittler, “An ethic is worthless unless it gives rise to effective, concrete action. [Sittler] accordingly emphasized [...] that the churches witness to God’s grace in creation must be in deeds as well as words.”¹⁶² Pastors often discuss the emotional letdown after seminary when they realize that conveying theological insight in ministry is not as easy as one would like it to be. Relational conflict, political context, economic strife, and pastoral weariness often get in the way of a community living out theological ideals. This is especially true of ecotheology, as the paradigm shift required to ensure ecological health, described in the previous chapter, necessitates a change in lifestyle and worldview that is no easy feat.

Sittler calls for “ethicality” in our ecotheology. “By ethicality is meant the necessity for the organization of life toward continuation, care and enhancement [of earth], if life is to [exist] at all.” Faith must be at the center of understanding and action.¹⁶³ But, as we see in the synod members’ perspectives on the challenges and benefits of fracking, such ethicality is far from unambiguous. But in Scripture, Christians are assured that the daunting challenges are made small with faith. In John 16:33, Jesus says, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may

¹⁶² Peter W. Bakken, “Nature as a Theater of Grace,” Sittler, Joseph, Steven Bouma-Prediger, and Peter W. Bakken. *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*. W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000:14.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 14-18.

have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”¹⁶⁴ I interpret this passage to mean an overcoming not of the material earth, but rather as an overcoming of the social constraints that keep us bound to worldly, short-sighted “pragmatism” that makes overcoming fossil fuel dependency, for example, so inordinately difficult. But in Matthew 7:13-14, Jesus says that such a path is ultimately the most rewarding: “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”¹⁶⁵ The gospel emphasizes that such a journey must be fueled not by human ability, but by faith. “With man it is impossible, but not with God. For all things are possible with God,” Jesus says in Mark 10:27.¹⁶⁶

Taking this path as a community of believers, as the Synod is attempting to do, requires faith and trust – not only in God but also in each other. In this synod, with such a diversity of opinion on fracking, the challenge will be to resolve differences and unite in vision before any effective action on fracking can occur. Even if this unity is not fully achieved, the faithful effort to respect all members will keep the church grounded in a place of love, not judgment. In this chapter, I consider how synod members view the church’s proper role in the shale gas situation and in the broader task of Creation care (the preferred term for ecotheology within most modern churches). Then I will look into how some of these divergent points of view can be resolved in order for the church to be a source of renewal in this struggle.

¹⁶⁴ John 16:33, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version 1984.

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 7:14, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version 1984.

¹⁶⁶ Mark 10:27, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version 1984.



Fig. 13: Near Shale Gas Well in Pine Creek (Lycoming County); Source: Lena Connor

Care of the Earth in the Synod:

As synod leaders admitted, a focus on environmental stewardship has not been the synod's strongpoint historically. Rev. Ruth Erikson, a young pastor who is one of the synod leaders, says that the idea of Creation care has not been enough of a passion in the synod to make it a priority until recently, when the passion of a few like Rev. Adler and Rev. Hahn inspired the creation of a Creation Care and Social Justice Committee in the Synod. Before that, efforts had been unsuccessful:

We had a team of people in our synod who were meeting under social justice and it wasn't a very functional group and there was one guy who was kind of abrasive and he was the environmental guy. And he kind of turned people off. So we let that committee go, in part, because it wasn't working due to the people on it. He was a die-hard but had a hard time dialoging with people.

She and others explained that awareness of ecological issues in the synod's churches, as in many American Christian cultures, has been limited.

Rev. Engel, who grew up in Germany, says that he was struck by the difference between the German Lutheran Church and its counterpart in the United States:

In Germany, the [Lutheran] church has been much more behind the environmental movement. And the church has lagged here. It's a theme of the younger generation that we haven't picked up on. I've been attending Lutheran Advocacy meetings for 12 years. And my evaluation form would always raise the environmental question. But it wasn't until fracking that Lutheran Advocacy decided it was an issue we should talk about. Yes, it's an important issue, but you know, there are other very important ones as well.

But even now that the church is openly discussing fracking as a theological issue, some in the synod were taken aback by the idea of the church's involvement. Frank Hiland commented that people in the area and in the synod rarely discuss fracking from a faith perspective. When asked how religion influenced his thoughts on this issue, he answered:

I thought about that sitting there [during church]. It's just like when I was in the military service. There was no religion built into fighting. In the same way, there is no religion built into fracking, is there? But as far as religion, no one talks about it [in relation to fracking]. It's just about money.

This dichotomy between theological language and the secular language of economic or political rationalism was common in synod members' approach to fracking. It is emblematic of the passage in the book of Matthew that says, "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."¹⁶⁷ This comparison is not meant to demonize those who speak in the language of economics, but rather to emphasize the difficulty to reconcile the two ends of discourse.

But others in the synod say that pastors in the synod are increasingly incorporating Creation care into their ministries and that congregants are following their lead. Becky Loft, a member of Rev. Nancy Adler's church believes that the fracking initiative aligns with other ecological endeavors that the church is taking:

¹⁶⁷ Matthew, 6:24, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version 1984.

Well, I think the church should help get the legislature to look into regulations to help protect the people. And I think as a Christian, we should care for the earth. God made this Earth, we need to take of it. We have to recycle, which our church is passionate about. We need to do all the things necessary to take care of it. And I think working with the legislature, we can pass bills that would protect us a little more.

Rev. Allen Kappel says that the ELCA as a national body has provided many resources for congregations on earth care since its founding in the 1960s:

Our social statements, even back to the founding of the [ELCA] have called us to be careful stewards of what God has given. And if that doesn't involve a theology of creation, if that doesn't involve issues like stewardship and shepherding resources, if it doesn't involve caring for the poor, than we need to do more than what we've been doing in the past. And that's where the church finds itself being accused of meddling in politics. Yes, but that's where the decisions are made. We are not going to pray them away on Sunday morning if we are not willing to go work on them on Monday through Saturday.

His emphasis on living Creation care, even when it is politically controversial, is representative of the opinions of several anti-fracking pastors in the synod who believe that vocal action is vital even if it leads to some conflict.

But others in the synod think that church action on Creation care, and in particular its opposition to fracking, may cause more trouble than it is worth. Rev. Bobby Hahn, who was once a pioneer on environmental issues in the synod, co-founding that Interfaith Sacred Earth Coalition with Rev. Adler, had a change of heart on the church's proper approach with ecotheology. He saw that some of the environmental rhetoric from Lutheran leaders caused resentment and alienation within his congregation. He gives the following example:

One problem I have with what is going on now, especially with fracking, is this. I'll give you a good example. Greenfaith, who [the] seminary got involved with, taught a class there in the summer. But they had in there, they were talking about factory farmers, about how factory farms are morally questionable. Well, our congregation here is filled with factory farmers. I wrote a letter to Professor Vogt and told him I had a problem with that. I wanted them to show both sides. The way that it was written, it never showed the environmental regulations of the factory farming industry.

He says that this approach to Creation care puts him a bind with his factory farm congregants:

So this is a good example of when the church starts talking about things it doesn't really understand. So I said to Dr. Vogt, 'Does this mean that members of my congregation

[that factory farm], does this mean they are no longer members of my church? Because these are guys that come and faithfully worship every week. And where was the church when they had to go to factory farms?’ Dr. Vogt is great, and I know that he would normally give both views. But this is just one example of when, instead of focusing on the gospel, we start focusing on controversial things.

In his comment, we see the idea that church also does not have the scientific or practical knowledge to approach the issue and should stick to a specific, traditional application of the gospel (which we will examine later in this chapter).

But this sentiment masks a deeper frustration that ecotheological principles, even if they are at the heart of the gospel, will contradict the lifestyles of otherwise faithful congregants. Thus, it is easier to shove the ecotheology away than to provoke controversy or ask parishioners to reconsider their farming practices – and likewise to question their decisions on fracking. This is when the verse in Matthew about the impossibility of serving two masters is poignantly applicable. Inspiring parishioners to serve not the logic of the market, but the logic of God in his creation is risky in the short term, but necessary in the scale of eternity.

Reactions to the Synod Resolutions on Fracking:

I witnessed similar arguments in the formal conversation on fracking and Creation care in the Synod Assembly. While I will not quote participants in the Synod Assembly debate about the fracking resolutions, out of respect for the privacy of the synod, I will say that the conversation focused on the validity of the “whereas” clauses that listed the risks and concerns about fracking.¹⁶⁸ As a reminder, the first resolution resolves that the synod should form a taskforce to investigate fracking, distribute the resulting educational materials to congregations, and to help facilitate church dialogue on this technology’s impact on the human and ecological community. The second resolution resolves that the church’s official position of fracking is a call for the Pennsylvania government to impose a moratorium on all new shale gas wells until more

¹⁶⁸ See Appendices A-C for full texts.

scientific research could be done on the safety of the drilling. Both resolutions justify the resolves with a lengthy explanation of why fracking was potentially dangerous to the area and incompatible with Christian ethics.

Before voting on the resolutions, the synod engaged in an hour of debate. This followed a panel workshop in the morning, organized by Rev. Adler, that featured four experts on fracking, including a hydro-geologist, a representative from the gas industry's Marcellus Shale Coalition, an anti-fracking activist and philosophy professor, and a radio journalist moderator. The panel was helpful for dialogue during the debate, as many referenced the information gleaned from it during the hour-long conversation about whether or not to pass the resolutions and the memorial. But the opposed viewpoints about the scientific safety of fracking during the panel debate mirrored the contention during the synod debate. As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the debate in the synod, with only a few exceptions, did not address theological imperatives, but rather resembled a secular political debate about the authority of scientific studies, the authenticity of industry and politicians, and economic pragmatism versus precautionary principle. It struck me that this was a sign that these parishioners were not accustomed to discussing issues like fracking using terminology from their faith tradition. Unlike sexuality issues, for example, which the church has claimed as "theological territory," environmental issues have been considered "secular territory" for decades.

In fact, many synod representatives questioned the resolution not because of the resolves themselves, but rather because of the many clauses that asserted scientific truths about fracking; they argued that the church did not have the authority to make such judgments. Ultimately, an amendment to the resolution was proposed that struck the many "whereas" clauses that contained allegedly "controversial" statements about fracking, only keeping the initial theological statements about earth care and the final resolutions. However, this

compromise seemed to satisfy many of those with doubts about the resolution, and both resolutions passed, the first by a wide margin and the second by a narrower margin (110 votes to 92 votes). Overall, the discourse was civil and orderly, with the Bishop enforcing strict adherence to Robert's Rules of Order. However, though no one engaged in mudslinging, there were two distinct and vocal camps during the debate – those who were pro-fracking and questioned the validity of the safety concerns and those who were anti-fracking and supported the church's activism against the gas industry that could not be trusted. Nevertheless, it was heartening to see that most of the synod believed that further discussion about the issue within congregations and an appointed taskforce would be beneficial.

Rev. Dr. Robin Vogt was shocked the resolutions passed and that the Upper Susquehanna Synod is the first Lutheran synod to move on this issue. He says that he thought it would come from the Southeast of Pennsylvania that has been through the "industrial ringer" or in a more liberal, urban area like Philadelphia or New York City. Sam Baurer, who works in the Synod Office, comments that he was very surprised that they resolutions passed, as the area is normally conservative on such issues and that he was pleased with the tone of the discussion:

I think there was good discussion. It definitely is a polarizing issue. But I thought the discussion was pretty civil. Everyone presented his or her sides. There was quite a bit of the original resolution was stricken. Because people felt that there were parts of the resolutions that weren't substantiated. But they kept the resolve clauses.

Rev. Engel recounts that he defended the resolutions in the assembly, citing the health concerns he has seen in his area. He believes the church can be a source of support and information for the surrounding communities:

Well I spoke up for them. Because I think that we as a church have to stand up that we have real concerns about some of the environmental impacts that we need to look into – and not just trust the industry that they will do it themselves or let them be watched by the politicians that line their pockets with their money. The people who live here need some more information about what is going on. And hopefully have more safety and security about what's going on. And some comfort and safety for the health of the community now and for future generations.

He attributes their passage to the initiative of progressive pastors and the mounting and bi-partisan concerns about fracking in the synod.

Rev. Tom Schumann is very pleased the resolutions passed but is vexed by the accusations that the scientific assertions in the resolution were false. He says that he reviewed the resolution before it was submitted to the Synod Committee of Reference and Council, and though he edited out a few inflammatory words, but found Rev. Adler's sources very reliable:

I didn't think that some of the citations they took out weren't based on science. She had some really credible sources. She wasn't quoting the crazy fanatics on either end, she was quoting some very reputable sources. I was surprised at the guy who first said that. He's a good guy and the Synod Council Vice President. And when he said that, I just kind of turned and thought, "What? I can see some other people here saying that, but not you!"

Rev. Kappel agrees, claiming that the amendment took some of the strength out of the resolutions, in terms of being an advocacy tool:

When we passed the resolution in the synod, it was a bit of a disappointment, because during the debate, most of the factual information was dropped. I was a little upset with that because it was kind of an Archie Bunker thing. 'This inflammatory language, it's full of errors' [some said]. Show me one [error]. And they couldn't. 'The language is not inflammatory; you're just opposed,' I thought.

But he hopes that once the task force does its research the church can work some of the factual information back into the church's official stance and perhaps can convince the synod that the scientific concerns about fracking are verifiable.

But those in favor of the amendment state that they want to make sure the final document talks about the benefits of fracking as well and offers a feasible action for the church.

To Ed Hoffman, the moratorium is pointless, because it is not politically possible:

The people who say we should completely ban it, they're behind the times. The synod voted on the proposition to stop and study it. I have no problem with studying it, although the study is three years too late in my opinion. I just had a problem with the information in the resolutions that were only half-truths. And we were able to get those eliminated. And I'm the guy who made the amendment to remove those.

This reason for concern is common. Conservative synod members think the resolution is less theological than it is ideological and that it lacks compassion for those who now rely upon the gas industry for their livelihood.

For example, Donna Heinz says that she stood up in the Synod Assembly debate and expressed that while she could see both sides of the issue, she thought the rhetoric of the resolution was judgmental and alienating. She thought the church should not be addressing the issue at all:

[The church leaders] don't belong in [the fracking issue]. The church should be [in the heart]. It has no business in [this issue]. I'm sorry. They don't belong in this. But if they want to open up a dialogue, do not take a stick, take a carrot. That whole mess at assembly was nothing but a stick. It was a club. That was disgusting.

With a son in the gas industry and a family history of contracting for industry, she felt that the anti-fracking individuals were demonizing her family's decisions. As an observer of the Synod Assembly, I must say that I think this statement is hyperbolic, for the anti-fracking participants in the debate were not aggressive in their demeanor, as her "club" analogy would imply. However, they did tend to lump all gas companies together as untrustworthy "bad guys" in the situation. Consequently, it is logical (if a bit ungenerous) that members like Mrs. Heinz, whose son works for the industry, would take that as an adversarial position. This sentiment could be instructive for synod leaders as they frame the fracking issue in debates. We will discuss this later on in this chapter in the section on business ethics.

In contrast, Rev. Schumann believes the debate was very necessary and that he hopes it will only be the beginning of more discussion within the church about fracking and what the church's role should be in addressing it in faith:

The church needs to be a place where this is talked about theologically. We need to look at scripture. We need to look at Creation and the whole world. And if that theological part of the resolution that we passed can come forth, that would be incredibly helpful. Whether or not the Synod decides to do that. I mean, we've passed a lot of resolutions that went nowhere.

Maintaining momentum will be a challenge, he thinks. But the passion of pastors like Rev. Adler will help push the synod into action, he hopes. Rev. Jim Erikson, the husband of Rev. Ruth Erikson and also a synod leader, says that when he moved to the synod from New York City he learned that the “sense of time” is very difficult in the area and that it is likely that the synod will move slowly on the task.

Synod History with Conflict:

Rev. Paul Lehrer believes that the key to any successful action on the synod’s part will be a successful effort to limit conflict within congregations and ensure that each synod member feels respected, included, and loved—even if the church moves in a direction that will not please everyone. Rev. Alfred Poirier, who has authored books on church conflict, observes, “Christ is the reason many enter the pastorate. Conflict is the reason many leave.” For church leaders, “the reality of conflict and an inability to respond to it in a wise, godly and gospel manner [...] cripple both their effectiveness as pastors and their church’s witness.”¹⁶⁹ Rev. Ruth Erikson says that this has been a problem in the synod, especially with the discussions about sexuality and LGBTQ rights a few years ago. She says as opposed to some churches, which have difficulties with loud, exposed conflict, the problem in this synod is with people bottling conflict. They harbor quiet resentment that degrades community. She believes it is due to a cultural aversion to dialogue about conflict. People will stop coming to church rather than “being attentive to the community’s fabric” and resolving disputes. Her husband explains that many congregations are so connected by kinship ties that they avoid discussing conflict to keep the family units close in the church.

¹⁶⁹ Alfred Poirier. *Peacemaking Pastor, The: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*. Baker Books, 2006: 9.

Mrs. Loft explains that the sexuality issue caused lots of tension in the church because people would not discuss it openly. Instead, they let anger fester, especially towards the progressive leadership that tends to be more liberal than the rural congregants. She continues:

Our church is not a very open church that says, 'Gee, let's sit down and talk about this.' And that's unfortunate because it causes a lot of hurt feelings, a lot of misunderstandings. And so how to get around that... Maybe just, I don't know if I've seen anything about having a [forum], saying 'Let's sit down on this date, on this night, and discuss this.' And I think that may be a way. People tend to shy away from those things because that means confrontation and 'Goodness knows, we wouldn't want to do that!'

This aversion to confrontation spares the churches from visible feuds, but means that discussions about controversial issues happen outside of the church, limiting the role of the church as a peacemaking or politically influential institution.

But Rev. Hahn believes that this was not the proper role of the church:

In this synod here, forty percent of our congregations are failing [due to lack of membership.] The synod had a meeting last year to deal with the failing churches. So to focus on controversial issues [is a mistake]. I think it would be a lot better to just stick to the Gospel. Because not only fracking, but the human sexuality issue, was [difficult]. This is a very conservative area. We're really into dangerous territory with these congregations.

He knows many people who left the church after the sexuality church and two congregations that broke off from the synod entirely to join the more conservative Lutheran sects. "Extreme environmentalism" was likely to have the same effect, he argued. In Rev. Hahn's comment, we can see a definition of "the Gospel" which confines it to an evangelical identity-based salvation narrative, as we discussed in the previous chapter. According to traditional Lutheran theology, what is missing in his analysis is an understanding that "the Gospel" (or the recorded narratives of Jesus' life) reveal that "controversial" subjects such as sexuality, social stigma, economic inequality, and injustice are the topics that Jesus spent most of his time on Earth talking about.

Rev. Hahn's theological leanings suggest an ideological schism that is occurring in many mainline Protestant churches like the ELCA, where theological differences tend to parallel the

political party divide. Political ideology – even over theological or doctrinal ideology – is splitting congregations and even whole denominations. With partisan worldviews in media drowning out or capturing the perspectives coming from the pulpit, separating theological argumentation from political baggage is increasingly difficult. The Christian Right, traditionally composed of Evangelical or fundamentalist sects is in opposition to the Christian Left that encompasses many of the mainline Protestant denominations. But many of these traditional denominations are experiencing fracturing, as groups of churches split off to form more conservative synods or denominations. The Missouri Lutheran Synod is the name of the largest conservative branch of Lutheranism that broke away from the ELCA due to its more conservative political and ideological leanings and its opinions on gay marriage.

This political strain undergirds the tension about fracking in the synod. Rev. Dr. Vogt says that when the local Lutheran seminary hosted an event on fracking, some pastors who attended were hesitant of bringing up fracking in their congregations, for fear that it would unearth partisan conflict:

We had a pastor [at the fracking event] who was telling stories about congregation members who had bumper stickers saying they hate Obama and that they exist in the same room with [very liberal] people. He gets called a bleeding heart liberal. He represents the group that just wants to hang on to [the tenuous truce and maintain peace].

Rev. Dr. Vogt explains that while the synod is much more moderate than Evangelical churches, there is a vocal minority that wants the Lutheran Church to be a more right wing religion. He conveys that among some Lutherans in the synod, there is a distrust of Lutheran seminaries, which tend to be progressive.

Rev. Jim Erikson articulates that the national leaders in the ELCA tend to be more liberal, as do a slight majority of the pastors in the synod:

Most people in this area, churchgoers or not, tend to be conservative. So, when I talk with people in general, I usually hear a conservative viewpoint on things. Most people who

have talked to me about it have been pro-fracking. But a slight majority of our pastors tend to be more liberal.

His wife says that as a young, progressive pastor she quickly learned to not bring up politics in church and to remain neutral about elections and controversial issues:

Which is a shift of forty or fifty years ago when pastors were really at the forefront of political change. In the civil rights movement, many of them were taking stands and confronting issues. I think there hasn't been as much for us to rally around or feel comfortable rallying around without alienating people. I think we have been less willing to alienate people for the sake of the gospel.

Unlike in nineteenth and twentieth century when theological belief was a focus on national conversation and Lutherans were quite distinct from other sects of Protestants and well versed in their doctrine, today political dogma is privileged over prior to religious dogma. The focus of conflict has therefore been transferred. As Rev. Ruth Erikson explains:

I think as Lutherans, we are part of an increasingly polarized culture. We are pushed into these categories and you see that in the church too. We are more divided in the church than we are between other congregations, between Lutherans and Presbyterians and Episcopalians. We have more diversity with fellow Lutherans. Conservative Lutherans and conservative Presbyterians have more in common with each other than with their liberal counterparts.

However, this situation has the potential to be positive for the church, as it can act as a mediator of conflict rather than a source of conflict. But to do so requires church leaders to have courage, compassion, and patience.

Opportunities for Conflict Resolution in the Synod:

By almost unanimously voting for the taskforce and church dialogue on fracking, synod members signaled that they wanted to church to act as such a mediator in intra-congregational conflict and as a resolver of incongruous information coming into the synod from a multitude of sources. According to theological tradition, the church must do this with the peace and love of Christ in mind. As it says in James 3:17, "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and

sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”¹⁷⁰ Applied ecotheology, with its goal of peace between human and non-human communities, cannot be achieved without this mindset. Rev. Dr. Vogt asserts:

As a church, we have a strong doctrine of ministry that says the churches needs are more important than me being right, or me winning.

Even though he believes fracking is ethically wrong and must be stopped, Rev. Dr. Vogt says that in the Lutheran tradition, approaching such issues with humility is important.

While those I interviewed have differing views on fracking itself, all believe open and loving discussion is essential, as church community is the first priority. Even Mrs. Heinz, who opposed both resolutions, says:

What I would like to see come out of this is for the synod to have a panel to discuss this. Not a panel where you're all lined up, but a round table where you're looking at each other. And we need to discuss it. Because we have too many differing views.

Rev. Hahn agrees, stating that the theological idea of communion was crucial:

When I was in the Lutheran World Federation in Germany for two and a half weeks with Dr. Dieter studying systematic theology. He always emphasized the importance of the communion. We're always going to have our differences, some are going to be more conservative, some are going to be more liberal, and some moderate, but keeping everything together is important.

To Mrs. Heinz, it is essential that in these discussions, everyone should feel that their opinion is valuable, as at the moment, she feels the anti-fracking voices are louder. Mr. Baurer is of the same mind, saying that the church should make sure to make those who defend the industry feel included and appreciated. The challenge for synod leaders, if they decide that the church needs to actively advocate for the moratorium on fracking, will be to do this in a way that makes those against the moratorium still feel a valuable member of the synod.

¹⁷⁰ James 3:17, *The Holy Bible*, New International Version 1984.

Ted Lowe, who worked for the gas industry, says that the conversations within his own congregation have been very supportive, even if he was discussing the industry with people who were against it:

I think they were mostly speaking out about the potential environmental harm [not the workers]. I never personally felt threatened or that they were saying bad things about my job or me. I mean, especially everybody at our church. We're a pretty tight congregation. They all know our situation. They know we've got five kids and that [I needed the job]. It was just a job for me. I think Pastor [Adler] was a bit worried after she started talking about it because she knew I worked for the industry. But I never took it personally, or took anything to be against the workers. She spoke for the safety of the environment, the safety of the workers. I think that was another big [reason] that I stayed after church and had conversations about it, because I felt respected.

In fact, the church is one of the few places where anti-fracking and pro-fracking individuals can come together and engage in respectful dialogue with the mutual commitment to love each other despite differences. Though the synod has a poor track record with other controversial issues, some I spoke with have hope that things will be better with fracking. If dialogue is facilitated well, church members can move past impasses and come up with creative solutions, compromises and opportunities for the church to serve.

Of all the pastors with whom I spoke, Rev. Lehrer's church had the most innovative approach to fracking and conflict. He told me about a new method for dialogue that they have started in their congregation when they were suffering from partisan conflict:

Relationship building is essential in the church. A guy in my congregation who is a medical doctor also has a theological education and he does this thing with me called 'Fridays in the Public Square.' We meet at the church and we talk about these issues together. And people from all different parts of the spectrum come together. So we can have people who are really ecologically minded, who grew up in the 1960s. And we have the business people there and they are all talking to each other. And we don't kill each other! And at the end of the discussion, we are all friends again. And then next time we meet, we can get along.

He says that the church has now been doing the exercise for four years and it has improved cohesion in their church immensely:

We've talked about the sexuality issue before the 2009 church-wide assembly. And people were all over the board here in this church. But we've had no problems because we talk about it. And then, just an example, when we have Friday discussions, on Sunday morning I can stand up and say, 'This happened, and this happened, and this happened. And the most important thing that happened is that we voted that we will continue to be in conversation about this and that we are moving forward as God's people together.' I'll talk to colleagues about these issues, and they'll say, 'I couldn't bring it up because they would hate me and people would want to leave the church.' No! You've got to talk about it! I mean, I'm really progressive but not everyone here is progressive. But they like me because we talk about these issues and we can move forward and respect each other's opinions. And it's the same with this issue, with the gas extraction.

They hold the forum each week on different topics, from health care to global hunger to the natural gas industry. Rev. Lehrer has approached the synod staff about making it a synod-wide practice and thinks it would be particularly useful with the fracking controversy.



Fig. 14: Singing a Hymn at the Upper Susquehanna Synod Assembly; Source: Lena Connor

The Role of the Pastor in Dialogue about Fracking:

For pastors like Rev. Lehrer, solving such quarrels is more than just a means to an end. For the conflict is more than just an inconvenient barrier to ecotheological success on issues like fracking. Rather, the discord that manifests itself in the synod's fracking debate is indicative of the very sin that causes ecological predicaments like fracking. To sin – or to distance ourselves from God – is what causes the breach between divine understanding about harmonious ecosystems and between each other as we seek to address such issues. Alfred Poirier, the specialist on church conflict referenced above, writes that the role of the pastor is to build bridges over these chasms, to mediate the ecological and social conflict: "We who say we have been called to the ministry of reconciliation ought to be most familiar with and transformed by this story of mediation [in Jesus' life]. If we know our Bible and our God, we know that the call to peacemaking – to mediation – has its roots not in a few scattered [Bible] verses but in the rich, deep soil of the divine story that extends as far back as the garden, the fall of man, and God's promise of a mediator [in Christ]."¹⁷¹ In the Christian community, we assert that we have divine assistance with mediation, if we rest our faith in that source of guidance and strength.

Rev. Schumann says that he respects the courage that Rev. Adler has demonstrated in taking an activist role on fracking:

It usually takes a passionate pastor or passionate church members [to inspire action on something like fracking], in some ways at great risk. Because that really can disturb the status quo.

Rev. Adler says that her faith in Christ is the only thing that keeps her going through this process, as leading church on the issue has been arduous. Though some in the synod think Rev. Adler's ecotheological rhetoric is not accepting of pro-fracking synod members, members of her

¹⁷¹ Poirier, 185.

own congregation think that she has led the charge with grace and understanding. Mr. Lowe says that she is very respectful and attentive to his position as a gas worker and communicates with him often about what she is going to include in her sermons about fracking. Though initially taken aback by her strong stance on fracking, he says that her kindness won him over:

I think her stance on the environmental side of things was really good. I think it was an added benefit that she has me as one of her parishioners, because there have been a couple of times when she would call me and ask me and about what was going on. And I was able to give her an inside perspective about what was really going on out there.

He likes to see leaders in the church take action on fracking safety, he admits:

I like to see [the church] actually going out and doing something. I think it's really great that Pastor [Adler] is going to these rallies and things. Listening to what they're talking about and listening to what the concerns are. I think that's a really good thing for us as a church to be involved in.

Mrs. Loft adds that Rev. Adler's passion has inspired her to get involved in the advocacy work surrounding fracking and that Rev. Adler has helped guide the church through the tough issues:

My feeling is that Pastor [Adler] talks about it often, but I don't feel that she talks about it a way that threatens anyone. And we have talked, she and I, and I've said to my husband: 'If someone said that they found gas under our property and they were going to pay us big bucks (I've heard \$30,000 a month). But say that someone said that to you. And it meant that we could live on easy street. What would we do?' And I talked to Pastor [Adler] about that and she said, 'That's when you really have to think about what is the morally right thing.' If someone [offered] that to me, I would love to say that I would definitely turn my back on it. I know it's a bad use of our resources. But could I walk away from the money? I think I would. It would be a really hard thing, but I think I would.

Rev. Adler discloses that she prays often, asking God to give her strength as she tries to lead on this complex issue.

Many pastors I spoke with express that one of the biggest challenges is finding ways to effectively articulate the theological imperative to care for the earth and for each other in a way that motivates *action* on fracking and other issues. Rev. Engel explains:

Creation has always been part of my personal theology. At the same time, [it is] something that few of my members have been open to. When I first came here, I got some funny comments about [my emphasis on Creation theology] was strange and new. But after twelve years, they are getting used to me. Though I still haven't convinced them to stop using disposable dishware at the church. These kind of habits are hard to change. Some have made significant progress.

Rev. Jim Erikson's seminary training was only partially sufficient in preparing him for this work, he acknowledges:

I had one professor who laid out this vision of the church as a community of discourse. That should be the place where people can come together from a theological perspective. But in seminary, we are trained in the categories of analysis and dialogue and discourse. [I recently read] Ministry in an Oral Culture, by Tex Sample. And I wish I had read this ten years ago, when I first came here. Because people in an oral culture, which is usually rural areas and probably the majority of Americans, think in terms of relationships, stories, and proverbs. And how we are trained in seminary, if we use that language and that thought process, you're speaking a different language. So, what we have to do in an oral culture, we have to translate the way we think into the oral culture categories of stories, relationships, and proverbs.

This translation requires that ecological facts and figures about fracking be translated into stories that can be used as parables. Rev. Dr. Vogt and Rev. Engel both see this occurring already, as pastors witness the health effects of fracking during routine hospital visits, or experience community feuds that stem from some parishioners getting rich and others remaining poor. These stories already are "bubbling up," Rev. Dr. Vogt claims. And pastors can use them to help relate fracking to Biblical subjects such as healing, sharing, wealth, and stewardship. Some, like Rev. Hahn, think that pastors' time would be better spent learning to articulate the Gospel in a more convincing way to help grow the churches. But others believed that this focus on fracking is a focus on the gospel and will *help* grow the churches.

The Role of the Fracking Taskforce in the Synod:

Similarly, synod members think that having a balanced task force to sift through information and develop a strategic plan for discourse will be helpful. Rev. Schumann articulates:

We need to have interested people within our synod – and the Bishop will do a good job picking people on both sides – to look at this issue with some care, so that we know what the long term impacts will be on our communities.

While some committees lose interest and lack long attention spans, fracking's large effect on the community coupled with its longevity will ensure the synod stays engaged, he predicts. Rev. Ruth Erikson says that this is the first time the synod has attempted such as specified taskforce on an issue like fracking:

We don't really have any precedent for this so we're not really sure what it will look like. It will probably go to the Synod Council who will look at it before it's distributed to congregations. The Synod Council is elected. There are three people from each of the six conferences in our synod. Two lay people and one clergy person. And then our officers, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, the Bishop and the staff. They meet every other month. They are the highest legislative body in the synod after the synod assembly, which just meets annually.

Once the Synod Council approves the materials and plan, the taskforce will then supervise the church dialogue and activism. Mr. Baurer says that the synod will reach out to the congregations through its three monthly newsletters and through a special publication called "Streams of Information" that is designed for special topics.

Rev. Schumann imagines that the idea of doing dispersed forums is better than a central forum:

The resolution calls for forums to be held around the synod, which works much better than doing one and asking everybody to come in. We have certain [communities] that don't travel.

Rev. Hahn surmises that it will be essential for these forums to include representatives from the industry and the government. He suggests they bring representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses, and state and federal government. He has several connections in D.C. and in Harrisburg, through his work with Lutheran Advocacy Ministries, and says he could get State Representative Fred Keller to lead a trip for the synod with Penn State professors and Anadarko.

The Synod's Role in the Community Debate about Fracking:

Rev. Hahn's suggestion raises a question about the role of the synod in the surrounding community as the whole state (and nation) grapples with fracking. Rev. Kappel says that already the Lutheran Church in Pennsylvania is actively working on lobbying for shale gas regulation through the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania [LAMP] in the state capital:

The LAMP group down in Harrisburg has been very helpful keeping clergy and interested laity apprised on what's happening in the legislative process. They have a really fine office and do great work for us. I wish what they distributed was read more widely. But it at least is getting an audience among clergy and informed lay leaders.

Rev. Ruth Erikson says that the synod has been a bit slower to make public statements:

I think to some degree, we have not been at the forefront at all. Well, we did have to wait and see what the synod assembly decided, because we couldn't take a public stand in any way without an agreement of the synod. Now, our stand is pretty firm, by calling for a moratorium.

But now that the resolution has passed, the synod is at the forefront of faith groups, as no religious organizations have passed anything formal on fracking (to my knowledge). For example, The National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program, the umbrella organization for mainline Protestant churches like the ELCA, is barred from action on fracking until its member denominations make public declarations on fracking. After the resolutions and memorial were passed, the synod put out press releases, which were covered by local news sources and a few environmental organizations, including Philadelphia-based Protect Our Waters.

Some, like Mrs. Heinz, are suspicious of such media promotion:

If they want to make an opinion on it, that's fine. But we have no authority to do anything [about fracking]. It's a media thing. To put it in the media that the Lutheran Church took a stand on fracking. The Lutheran Church should be worried about God's message being out in the world.

Mr. Hoffman believes that if the synod is going to be discussing the issue publically, they should be also active dialoguing with decision makers, rather than just making ideological statements:

You know, a lot of people don't like to hear politics in a Sunday morning service. But if the synod is going to do anything, we better put Fred Keller, our state representative, and some others involved.

Rev. Hahn concurs, saying that in his experience with local and state politicians, whom he works with on other issues, political change is more about networking than public stances:

If we have an issue, we'll just go meet with our local representatives in a local coffee shop and they know us and things actually get done. I don't know if the church realizes how politics really operates. It's all networking and relationships. A lot of the radicals started attacking the politicians but they don't even know the politicians. We do.

His church has been very successful in getting people to vote on local elections and has experience rallying the community, though he is hesitant to mobilize them on fracking.

Rev. Adler explains that she first got involved with fracking at rally in Philadelphia, where an interfaith group hosted a service after the protest march and talked about fracking and the sacredness of water. Before Rev. Hahn completely changed his position on fracking, they worked together to put together a petition on fracking for faith leaders and succeeded in getting fifty signatures in three days, which they delivered to the Susquehanna River Basin Commission. She described the meeting they attended where the commission voted on whether to approve fracking in the basin:

So we go to a meeting, this was back in December of 2011, and it was really a sight to behold – all of these people testifying on why they didn't want these permits to be allowed. [There were] retired people, physicians, nurses, mothers, clergy, just this whole parade of people giving these testimonies, including mine, and they voted to approve them anyway.

The decision frustrated her, she says, but the community of united activists energized her and inspired them to start a faith group to address fracking and other related issues:

[Rev. Hahn] and I started this interfaith Sacred Earth Coalition. So in January, I sent out an email after the fracking meeting. We had 40 people at the first meeting. We now have over 80 people for many different faith traditions – Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Unitarian, New Age, Nondenominational, Agnostics, and Atheists. Atheists who come say they are so happy that the faith community is speaking up about this, that they want to be a part of it. I've met people that I never would have otherwise.

Rev. Hahn says that he left the group because they got to “radical” for his tastes. But he still believes that the faith community can be involved in fracking, as long as they do not demonize politicians and the industry and try to work with them instead:

My personal opinion is that we can be a moral vision and I can talk to Senator Casey's people and say let's pray about this and try to protect the environment.

The two have split paths but hope to reconcile their differences. During my interviews, the split was a much-discussed curveball that became symbolic to synod members of the potential “messiness” of church advocacy work.

But, highlighting the bright side of advocacy, Rev. Ruth Erikson says that already she is seeing synod churches reaching out to the community to engage in dialogue. In the West Branch Conference of the Synod, in Williamsport, the churches hosted a forum on fracking and invited all the political representatives:

They also tried to invite people who have stories to tell about the impact of fracking on their lives, to share their stories about how fracking has helped them or hurt them. And the only representative who came was State Representative Rick Mirabito who is a Democrat and interested in regulating the industry. But the hope was that this was a part that needed to be told: the impact of fracking on individuals. The stories are important. It's more than just numbers. 'I have a job now, and I didn't.' Or 'My water is wrecked' or 'I got kicked out of an apartment I have lived in my whole life because I couldn't afford the tripling rents.'

In Rev. Engel's small community of Cogan Station, north of Williamsport, the Methodist Church and his Lutheran Church collaborated to host a dialogue in August about the gas industry in the local community center. We spoke before the event, but he expected about 50 people to show up. They were planning to discuss the impact of the industry on roads and water wells.



Fig. 15: Lutheran Church in Mazeppa (Union County); Source: Lena Connor

The Role of the Synod's Memorial to the ELCA:

One of the ways that the synod can make a larger impact is through the memorial that it passed along with the resolutions, which calls for the national body of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to address fracking during the ELCA National Assembly in August of 2013.

Rev. Kappel explains how this will work:

What will happen is that at the ELCA, memorials will come in from all 65 of our synods, and all must go through the hopper. Some will be combined if they are similar. Those that are unique will be freestanding. But each will be assigned and put on the agenda for consideration. And if there are any that are not acted on during the assembly, then they go the church council for their next step to see what they would want to do.

He hopes that the importance and timeliness of the synod's fracking memorial will compel the ELCA to take a stance on the issue, which will have much more clout in national press than the small synod's resolutions. Rev. Schumann says that the Bishop has concerns that there will be some synods that will not want to pass a moratorium:

When this resolution was coming forward in the synod, [Rev. Adler] spoke with Bishop and the Bishop said, 'There are bishops in other parts of the country who are not going to go for this at all. Because it's been part of what has happened for twenty years and it's not an issue and they're not going to come out against this.'

But others suspected that the ELCA national leadership was likely to look favorably on the resolution, as it has on other environmental resolutions.

The ELCA has already been paying attention to the issue. In a recent statement, ELCA Director for Environmental Education and Advocacy, Rev. Mary Minnette, said that the ELCA should ponder the following questions about fracking: "If we follow the advice of Paul in his letter to the Philippians and consider the interests of others before we consider our own, how do we answer the questions raised by fracking? Are the energy needs of our country more important than the long-term health of rural communities in another state such as Pennsylvania? Do we really have to choose between these things or can we find a way to make fracking safer for our communities and for the environment?"¹⁷² Rev. Amy Reumann, Director of Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania, says in her briefing on fracking on the LAMPA website: "The complex issues surrounding natural gas drilling call Lutherans to moral deliberation about this practice and its impacts. This deliberation might include the ELCA social statements on caring for creation and economic life. More important, the issue of fracking is an opportunity to listen closely to what Lutherans are experiencing in communities across Pennsylvania and to decide upon collective responses."¹⁷³ Rev. Adler hopes that the memorial can be a big step in the right direction for achieving this deliberation as a national body of Lutherans.

¹⁷² Mary Minnette. "'Fracking' Poses Challenges for Communities and Our Energy Future." *ELCA Living Earth* (June 2011), 1.

¹⁷³ Amy Reumann. "Natural Gas Drilling in the Marcellus Shale." *Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania Blog*, 2012. <http://lutheranadvocacypa.org/introduction-to-natural-gas-drilling/>, 1.



Fig. 16: Economically-depressed Community of Jersey Shore (Lycoming County); Source: Lena Connor

The Synod Role in Care for Those Affected by Fracking:

In response to questions like Rev. Minette's query about the church's role in carrying for other's needs, the synod resolution quotes Matthew 25:40: "I tell you the truth, whatever you do for one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do for me!" Rev. Adler says of the resolution:

This is an opportunity for this church to be very relevant in its public presence and to be able to do what Jesus asked us to do, which is to protect and defend those who are most vulnerable. In Micah 6, we are told that what does God require of us but to 'love justice, practice kindness, and walk humbly with our God.' This means not just for the human community, but for all of God's creation, for which we have been entrusted.

During my conversations with synod members, this emphasis on community ministry was a subject that excited congregants and pastors alike. Outreach ministry is something the synod practices prolifically, with initiatives like food banks, children and family outreach, global

hunger ministries, mission work in Liberia, an economic aid ministerium, and many other programs. At the Synod Assembly, I witnessed countless updates from a myriad of taskforces.

As a result, synod members had creative ideas for serving those who are impacted adversely by the gas industry. Rev. Dr. Vogt suggests:

I've emphasized that the church should be a place where people who want a different time line about their lease negotiations could get some support. If they don't want to say yes [to the company] right away, they don't want to be pressured into it, the church should be a place that says they deserve that and that they will be supported. That's the application I would make that the value that the Gospel expresses to the rights of people being of value. You have a right to negotiation, a different timeline.

Mr. Hoffman advises that due to all the funding cuts for rural agencies that are working to educate the communities about fracking, it would be helpful if the church lent a helping hand in the outreach work:

Let's think of working with Penn State's extension service. What if the church and the extension service worked together?

He emphasizes that the biggest thing the church could do was to work with the township supervisors, who need to be better educated about how to deal the gas industry:

Because once the gas companies are gone, if the townships haven't spent the money wisely, the people are going to suffer.

He said that protecting people from the effects of the inevitable bust was critical. Rev. Hahn is of the opinion that the churches have the resources to be very supportive of the poor in the area. His small country church gives \$40,000-\$70,000 a year to 13 charities in Union County. The wealthy factory farmers in his synod are very generous. And many leave lots of money to the church when they die, he says.

Rev. Jim Erikson says that the synod is very interested in addressing the housing pricing difficulties that the gas boom has caused:

We're going to find a way to provide housing [for the displaced]. And at first, we're going to start really modestly. Maybe there is a church that has an old parsonage that they aren't using that could be then be updated and rented at a price point they can

afford. And hopefully build on whatever success we have with that. [...] Building a bunch of new apartments is not a sustainable way to do it. So, the church can hopefully identify existing structures that can be converted. An old church that is not being used anymore or an old school, that type of thing. It's the kind of ministry that, whatever side of the fracking members are on, could [serve] as a common ground. And we can actually accomplish something that's going to help people on the ground.

Other members suggest that the church get involved in ecosystem remediation efforts, though they were daunted about the task of cleaning up fracking pollution. Reforestation efforts struck them as more achievable. I suggested they look into water monitoring and data collection, as many environmental organizations need volunteers to take samples from water bodies potentially affected by fracking.

One case study that almost every synod member brings up is the community of Riverdale, the trailer park that was displaced by the gas industry. Rev. Adler and several other synod members were very active in lobbying for the community to retain the right to stay on the land. Mrs. Heinz worked with Rev. Adler on the synod ministerium that went to help the community. Though she criticizes Rev. Adler and some of the other activists for falsely building up the community's expectations, she says that the work the ministerium was necessary:

I ended up talking to them down there. I worked closely with two families. One was a couple in their early 80s. He was on oxygen, she had cancer. They had nowhere to go and nowhere to move. The ministerium went down and they moved those people.

Mrs. Loft, who also went to help, relates that members of all faiths were there to help, from conservative Christians to Buddhists. She says that the experience cemented her resolved that the church should be involved in fracking:

I think that we need to as a church and as a group, work with the legislators even if they don't particularly want to [work with us]. And also, as Christians, supporting the people affected – supporting Riverdale – and when things are happening to people. I think that we are going to need to be there to pick up the pieces. And that's a very difficult thing for a church to do, but I also think that's what Christ calls us to do. Even just bringing together [people who don't agree.]

Regardless of her personal confusion about the safety of fracking, she said that she knew it was her job as a Christian to have compassion for the people at Riverdale.

The Synod's Role in Business Ethics and Reaching Out to Gas Workers:

Several pastors and congregants also mention the migrant gas workers as a potential ministry for the church. As Mr. Baurer imparts:

We have this influx of gas workers, some coming from other parts of the country. So what kind of ministries can we do for them? How can we show them Jesus' love as they become a temporary part of our community? What can we do? Can we give them comfort? Can we invite them to dinner at the church? Can we give them some feeling of community or family because they are away from theirs. I think in many situations, when looking for chances or opportunity to do some positive things, even when maybe something negative is happening, [is a good thing].

Rev. Lehrer admits that sometimes he struggles feeling welcoming to the workers, as they represent an industry that forced its way into the area without asking the community's permission:

My girlfriend and I call them the invaders. They are aliens. They are attacking. There are helicopters that come out, trying to map the area. She will go out there and try to chase them away. She won't allow them to come in and do the seismic testing on her property, but they continue to harass her with some of this stuff. So we call them the invaders.

His girlfriend, a Lutheran pastor in the synod and a hospital chaplain, has property north of Williamsport and refuses to sign a gas lease.

But he describes that he had to correct his first reactions to the gas workers. He told me the story of a gas worker from Montana or Wyoming who was one of the supervisors on a gas line project. He used to come to church every Sunday, for use of the means and grace and for the word and the sacrament, which were important to him. Rev. Lehrer continues:

So, he was a stranger among us. But we got to know him. And he needed to come and worship. And we had the place that was a familiar place for him to worship, with our Lutheran liturgy. And so, we call them the invaders, but they are the alien among us, [which is scriptural]. So what do we do? What is our task? Is it to shove them away or is to try to engage them in some way and to maybe try to influence something in them. Fracking is here, [but maybe we can influence the workers].

Mr. Doug Heinz approves of this idea, saying that many of the gas workers attend the Lutheran churches in Jersey Shore and Williamsport. Such outreach was essential if we wanted gas companies and their workers to act responsibly, pronounces Rev. Lehrer:

And it is our task as Christians to have a doctrine or a theology of vocation that people are called to different tasks. As a pastor, I don't know much about fracking. But if we have people who we've engaged in the faith and we can trust that they are going to do their jobs with an ethical understanding of stewardship of the environment, then maybe we can talk. And maybe we can get along a little better. And maybe we can make sure that we don't have 15-acre patches that are not going to grow anything for generations. And that the whole ecosystem is not going to be destroyed by what we do. We are all in this together [because we all use natural gas.]

Rev. Lehrer spoke of his own son, a geologist who is considering going into the oil and gas industry, saying that he hopes that he has imparted such an ethic to him and that he will act as a Christian in his future job.

Just as the synod is interested in working with gas workers there was also discussion in the synod assembly and during my interviews about the church's ability to influence business ethics writ large. Justin Welby, the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury and a former oil executive, publically campaigns on corporate sin and the necessity for religious organizations to dialogue with companies about ethical practice. He claims that capitalistic adherence to profit makes righteous action difficult, but that individual leaders within companies can have a potent effect on the "ethos" of companies.¹⁷⁴ Rev. Hahn says that the church should avoid saying that all businesses are evil and corrupt. Rev. Lehrer also dislikes some of the accusations that occurred during the synod debate:

I got upset at synod assembly and said 'These business people are out there and you can't trust any of them. They're going to do anything to make a buck no matter how much it pollutes the environment.' That's wrong. There are lots and lots of ethical people in these professions who have the same faith that we have and they're doing everything they can to make sure that this is going to be done safely.

¹⁷⁴ Andrew Brown. "Justin Welby on BP, Deepwater Horizon and Corporate Sin." *The Guardian*, November 18, 2012. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/andrewbrown/2012/nov/18/justin-welby-bp-deepwater-corporate-sin>: 1.

He knows the husband of a member at his church that works for a machinery company that supplies the gas industry. He has asked him to come and talk to the synod task force and give his impression of the people in the industry that he has met and the people he works with, who he says are fine people doing the best they can to work safely. Rev. Lehrer says he acknowledges that it is true that many gas companies and workers do cut corners to save time or to make a profit, but that he hopes that those tendencies can be constrained by public pressure. He also suggests that more women should be in positions of power in the companies, as he has seen that have a beneficial effect on company behavior.

Mrs. Heinz believes that much of industry safety is reliant upon the individual characters of contractors and overseers. She told me one of the most telling stories I heard during my time in the synod:

When I stood up at the assembly I said, I stand with one foot in each camp. My family has always been contractors. We've always had a very moral outlook. I've told you about my father and the clay mines. He was a coal miner too. Well, he was stripping clay in Renova, PA. And when he was done with the stripping, he went back in and instead of just flattening in or putting it into piles he made dips and valleys. [So it wouldn't erode]. I was twelve when this happened. And he bought these little trees. And I know he got them like ten for a penny. And he put this sack on me like Johnny Apple Seed and I had this thing of trees and a bucket of water, a stick and a cup. And he had me walk all over. And I would punch a hole, put a cup of water in, put a tree in. Take three big steps, do it all over again. And let me tell you something, I wanted to see these trees. So [my husband] took me up and I got up there and I said, 'Yeah, this is where Daddy stripped, but where are those trees?' And he said, 'Look up.' They are now about 60 feet tall! I'm serious! I planted a whole forest!

She relates that her father did that reclamation in the fifties, before there were any regulations, out of the goodness of his heart. He was a hunter and fisher and cared about the land, she said. There are good contractors and bad contractors, she concludes.

The assertion that the industry was full of rotten men makes her angry, she relayed:

I had objections to the wording they used in the resolution. They said our women were in danger of being raped and beat up, because these contractors were coming in. And I come from a long line of contractors and I don't know of anybody who did that. Maybe they got

drunk on the job, but they weren't out raping or looting the area. It's the guys that are here that are doing that.

Here, Mrs. Heinz references the clause in the resolution that cites a spike in violence against women in the area since the shale gas boom. Her husband, Mr. Doug Heinz says that the gas contractors and workers he had met were kind people, who were kind to women and who cared about the community:

One guy who worked on pipelines, when he left, he sent all the churches \$1,500 and thanked the community for letting him be here. He wanted to give something back to the community.

Her son said as a gas contractor, he emulates his grandfather, and enforces strict moral codes on his well pads. He once fired a man for cheating on his wife, he said. These statements might show a rather rosy view of gas companies and workers, but they also demonstrate a faith that human behavior can be influenced to behave morally if properly instructed and inspired.

Mr. Lowe, said that in his experience working for the gas company, he has met both kind people and immoral people, and that the church should work to praise companies and workers when they are committed to safety and shame them when they behave poorly:

The church is an important organization in the community to help people discuss what's going on and get to the bottom of whether these guys are doing it as safe as they possibly can and are following the regulations. I think there are companies that do cut corners and they cause spills and they pour frack water in the ground. They prioritize money over safety. I think that it would be a great thing for the church to be involved because the companies need to know [that people do care and are talking about it.]

Indeed, Christian churches have a long history of tempering the behavior of companies and rough workers. For example, churches greatly influenced the Gilded Age industries, fueling the Progressive Era movement toward regulation, unions, and temperance.



Fig. 17: Lutheran Church Interior in Cogan Station (in Lycoming County); Source; Lena Connor

Concluding Thoughts: The Next Generation of Synod Members

I was impressed with synod's ability to approach the issue of fracking and its theological dimension. For a group of churches with very little exposure to ecotheological theory, as is true of most Christian congregations, I believe that the members of this small synod have risen to the challenge and are giving serious consideration to the issue. Even those who were ardently against the synod's resolutions at least took the time to engage with me and with their fellow synod members on the issue. Apathy was not something I encountered often.

But there was a something I saw that was glaringly missing in the audience: young people. Everyone I spoke with was either middle-aged or elderly, and I saw few youth in the Synod Assembly or in the churches I visited. This is a problem that the synod openly admitted. Rev. Jim Erikson said that most of the congregations are aging. The rural exodus has hit Pennsylvania along with many rural states. Those who go to college rarely come back to the

area. Young children are common enough, but people aged 18 to 35 are absent. Worryingly, says Rev. Ruth Erikson, those who do stay and do not go to college do not come to church.

Mrs. Loft characterizes that the majority of her church as elderly, though she does notice more young families attending now that Rev. Adler is preaching. Mr. Hoffman sums it up saying:

And church members are getting older. We have to think how to keep the younger members engaged in the church system.

He has worked for decades to keep youth in farming, to keep them in the area, but that funding for programs like Future Farmers of America and 4-H Youth Development is being cut. Many emphasize that anything that the synod does to address fracking will have to a long-term effort, to protect future generations. But those future generations need to be present and engaged, caring for the land. But paradoxically, the only jobs currently available to keep them in the area are in the gas industry. It is a conundrum. Rev. Dr. Vogt says that this deeply affects the churches ability to strongly act on an issue like fracking:

I really see part of what we are doing [as a synod] is just staying and hanging on. To keep our churches [alive] and to keep our pastors around ministries going. That doesn't appeal very much to the real environmental movement, but if we pack up and go, who will be present and who will stay? There are some of our folks are dedicated to that. And it's not glamorous; its' hard.

He advises that America have patience with rural America when it seems unprogressive and stagnant. For it is suffering. And urban America, with its voracious energy needs and sneers about "rednecks" and "hicks" is doing little to help it renew itself.

The concluding chapter explores how to address this need for renewal in the rural church and community and how this shale gas issue can help frame the issues facing this synod an its surrounding communities. For as environmental historian William Cronon asserts, though humans can do great harm to the earth, they can also be its greatest defenders from the actions of other humans. An empty rural wilderness has no protectors. For humans cannot

protect what they do not love, what they do not know intimately.¹⁷⁵ Or as Wendell Berry says, a disconnection between the urban “center” and the rural “periphery” causes ignorance in both places. “[Local] knowledge that is not properly valued decreases in value, and so is finally lost,” he argues. “It is not possible to uproot virtually the whole agricultural population by economic adversity, replacing it with machines and chemicals, and still keep local knowledge of the land and land use at a high level of competence.”¹⁷⁶

The task for the church is to not only address fracking, but to try to address the underlying causes for fracking: the economic structures and deteriorating community and ecological relationships that make us so dependent on things like natural gas and the revenue it creates. And it must encourage its members to care deeply for the land they live on, to want to stay and tend to it. The church has a unique language in which to do these things. It has a language of grace and redemption – of guidance in the Spirit, renewal in Christ, and strength in God. At a conference on rural values and the family farm crisis in the 1980s, Joseph Sittler suggested to Lutheran pastors: “You’ve got to help yourself find a way to verbalize what you mean by value, by loss, by recognition. [...] The farther our children get from existential experience of the land, the more necessary this kind of rhetoric of grace about the world has got to be used in our preaching and teaching, and in our listening.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ William Cronon. “The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature.” *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 1996): 7–28.

¹⁷⁶ Berry, 117.

¹⁷⁷ Sittler, 15.

Conclusion: Seeds of Hope for the Upper Susquehanna Synod

Neither gold nor crystal can compare with it, nor can it be had for jewels of gold. Coral and jasper are not worthy of mention; the price of wisdom is beyond rubies. The topaz of Cush cannot compare with it; it cannot be bought with pure gold. "Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell? It is hidden from the eyes of every living thing, concealed even from the birds of the air. Destruction and Death say, 'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.' God understands the way to it and he alone knows where it dwells, for he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens. When he established the force of the wind and measured out the waters, when he made a decree for the rain and a path for the thunderstorm, then he looked at wisdom and appraised it; he confirmed it and tested it.

-Job 28:16

As this passage in Job queries: Where does wisdom come from and where does understanding dwell? As the Upper Susquehanna Synod puts it task force to work to attend to the issues surrounding fracking, wisdom they will need in spades. Wisdom that can allow the churches of the synod to be places for open and compassionate dialogue and a mediator of conflict caused by the industry. Wisdom that can embolden its leaders and lay members to be public advocates for marginalized people and ecosystems, communicators of ecological and social ethics, and tellers of the stories that local people share about by fracking. Wisdom that can remind the synod to be a source of support and healing aid for the residents, workers, animals, forests, and rivers that might be harmed by the chemicals used in the drilling process. And finally, wisdom that can inspire the synod to be a fount of prophetic vision for alternative economic structures, renewed ecosystems and communities, and simpler living.

Fortunately, the passage gives us an answer to the question it raises. This wisdom will not come from gold or rubies it says. So we might conclude that for the synod, wisdom will not come from gas royalties or industry shareholder returns. Destruction and death might seem to be all-powerful and inevitable when one thinks of the consequences of our fossil fuel addiction, from Pennsylvania to Nigeria to the Maldives, but the passage tells us these forces are very distant from the prized wisdom. Through our own efforts, we cannot reach it, for it is hidden from our eyes. Cost-benefit analysis and public policy crafting alone will never hit the mark.

Rather, the passage concludes, wisdom such as this can only come directly from God, who formed the universe and knows it intimately.

Martin Luther, also facing an ethical battle of large proportions, puzzled over a similar search for saving wisdom and seized upon Paul's words in Romans 1:17, that "in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last." His famous moment of revelation led him to believe that this broken world, made up of imperfect individuals, is justified by faith alone. We are made righteous and whole not through our own understanding, but through a humble reliance on God. So when Vagel Keller says "rural Pennsylvanians are on their own in quest of environmental justice,"¹⁷⁸ the question for the synod is how to achieve an environmental justice that is focused on the source of all Creation's justice.

Environmental justice, as defined by the EPA, is "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies." This goal is certainly applicable to the synod as they lobby the Pennsylvania and federal government to help protect rural citizens in their state from unregulated pollution from the shale gas industry. But the Christian definition of environmental justice goes a step beyond, saying that no true ecological justice will be achieved until human communities are bonded in love to each other, to Creation and to God. In Joseph Sittler's words, "God – man – nature! These three are meant for each other and restlessness will stalk our hearts and ambiguity our world until their cleavage is redeemed."¹⁷⁹ Peter W. Bakken wonders what "potentialities for

¹⁷⁸ Keller, 898.

¹⁷⁹ Sittler, 30.

life-enhancing symbiosis might appear” if we truly believed that these three are “meant for each other.”¹⁸⁰

Thus, I should amend my original research question to: *Guided by faith*, how might the Upper Susquehanna Synod of the ELCA, as a representative body of Lutheran churches that are steeped in tradition, use its history, community involvement, theology, and church structure to address an ecological quandary like fracking? For as I have unearthed in the last four chapters, all of these can be used as tools for the synod, but none are flawlessly suited to the task. Historically, Lutherans were humble but not saints. On the issue of fracking, synod members are perceptive but not all knowing. Theologically, synod members and scholars are attuned to God’s grace, but not always gracious in their application of such theory. And as a community, the structure of the synod is sound, but relationships need healing.

Even as a body of believers, the synod will not achieve its goal of being a source of light in the obscured darkness of this issue unless it actively focuses on that belief, taking the Kierkegaardian “leap of faith” that God can renew even in a situation so daunting to humans. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul declares, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” This Christian salvation, as synod members implied in earlier chapters, is not just a ticket to heaven, but a promise that God is constantly redeeming the whole of Creation for the good of all living beings. This eschatological end is present throughout the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament; God makes a covenant with the earth to protect it from harm and to rid it of sin.

In the face of large, apocalyptic environmental issues like climate change, it is sometimes hard to remain strong in the faith that God will renew. Hence, humans try to take full control of solving such problems, with a lack of awareness that it is such an emphasis on human

¹⁸⁰ Sittler, 18.

dominance over nature that gets us into fixes like climate change and fracking to begin with. Michael Northcott, one of the world's preeminent ecotheologians, who teaches as Edinburgh University, says that we must look to Christ for salvation, not to our own mastery: "Even more than the ancients, we in our industrial civilization have imagined we have acquired divine power in our ability to control nature. But instead of control over the earth industrial technologies are, quite literally, reaping the whirlwind."¹⁸¹

But despite this grave collective error, we see teams of people across the globe who are devoting their lives to healing the fever on this planet. Not through geo-engineering or a rush to drill for slightly greener fossil fuels to satisfy our energy appetites, but through humble living, daily care of ecosystems, and local alternatives to globalized consumption. Northcott continues, "All around there are seeds of hope in which the dominating powers are resisted. These seeds are in the Church and they are in the world. Those who plant and water them are nourished by a different vision of human flourishing than the one purveyed by advertisers of consumer goods and advocates of globalization. In this alternative vision the prophetic contrast between what is and what might be takes flesh, and dwells." In the face of fracking, the church should not be discouraged but have faith that God will provide these seeds of hope that can allow their communities to thrive in a way that is infinitely more sustainable than relying on the gas industry for sustenance.

"The preacher has the privilege of identifying the seeds of hope amidst the wreckage, and of setting forth through the words of Scripture, and in interaction with the practices of the people of God, a vision of the salvation shaped by the Hebrew prophets, and by the form of the reign of God revealed in Jesus Christ the Incarnate Word," Northcott argues. He asserts that ecological homiletics must be grounded in both Scripture and current events, following the

¹⁸¹ Michael S. Northcott. *Cuttle Fish, Clones and Cluster Bombs: Preaching, Politics, and Ecology*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd, 2010: 122.

tradition of theologian Karl Barth.¹⁸² But for a pastor or congregant in the Upper Susquehanna Synod, what would these seeds look like? After a lengthy call for humility – and only a week in the synod – it would be foolish to say that I have definitive answers for this synod. But I will highlight some themes, based on suggestions of the synod members themselves.

One strength of the synod is its ability to be a bridge builder between conservatives and liberals, gas companies and environmentalists, politicians and citizens. Well-respected in the community, the church can be a model for an alternative method of political negotiation. In conflict mediation circles, practitioners use the language of “interest-based negotiation” versus “position-based negotiation,” claiming that the latter leads to ideological impasses while the former helps the stakeholders acknowledge compromise on needs and wants. The church naturally helps people discuss issues in terms of interests and sets a goal not of compromise but of resolution. Additionally, the norms of forgiveness, compassion, and selfless giving at the core of Christian practice can help aid this process. Rev. Lehrer’s “Public Square Friday” is an excellent example of how the synod could help remind those participating that the end goal is not personal victory, but community flourishing.

As Wendell Berry says, in situations like fracking, “We lose, in short, the sense of shared humanity that would permit us to say even to our worst enemies, ‘We are working, after all, in your interest and your children’s. Ours is a common effort for the common good. Come and join us.’”¹⁸³ This common purpose is undermined in political discourse in America, where the media like to fuel sensationalist conflict and the modern liberal project tells us that self preservation and self fulfillment are the ultimate goals of life. But the church represents a starkly different way of viewing life, one that values generosity and the common good. “Only the purpose of a coherent community, fully alive in both the world and in the minds of its

¹⁸² Northcott, 11.

¹⁸³ Berry, 74.

members, can carry us beyond fragmentation, contradiction, negativity, teaching us to preserve, not in opposition but in affirmation and affection, all things needful to make us glad to live, concludes Berry.”¹⁸⁴

Therefore, for the synod, those people that might seem to some as the “enemy” in this situation, such as company leaders, gas workers, and politicians, must be treated with the same love and respect and forgiveness that any other living being deserves. This will be a balm to those who feel that an anti-fracking stance of the synod is antagonistic to those involved in the gas industry. However, this kindness is not an appeasement to the industry or a compromise that allows the synod to be complacent about speaking truth to power about the ill effects of the industry. Locating and encouraging good people in the industry does not redeem gas drilling, but it can limit its degrading consequences. Similarly, the conservative members of the synod have a fair point when they argue that the synod should work with politicians rather than against them. Like Jesus did with tax collectors, it is better to be in relationship with such government representatives and encourage them to do good work than to rail against them in hate.

Fracking, like many of the extractive industries in Pennsylvania history, has the potential to encourage greed and blight, unless tempered by ameliorating morality. As William Wright said of the first oil boom, people of faith must seek to encourage within their congregations and communities a religious observance that loves mercy and hates covetousness.¹⁸⁵ So pastors in the synod, while they should be kind and gracious, should not be afraid to take a public and political stance against fracking. Forced neutrality is a secular concept and can often slip into complacency. But the trick is to not allow public theology to

¹⁸⁴ Berry, 77-78.

¹⁸⁵ Wright, 57.

become engulfed in political or partisan ideology. The church has an opportunity to transcend such divides, and should do if as it works on fracking.

As several pastors in the synod suggest, a good way to remind parishioners why it is important to bring their faith to discussions of fracking is to use the sacraments. They are traditional rituals that show us why we should be attentive to our material world, which God created and finds good, according to Genesis. Rev. Adler's symbol of baptizing one's baby in fracked water is a powerful representation of how abusing the natural world is a blasphemy to traditions of Christianity. These rituals we do each generation as Christians are signs of God's faithfulness over time. Therefore, the image of polluting the water with fracking chemicals is emblematic of the way that we lack reciprocal faithfulness to God and to each other when we fail to care for our home properly. The River Jordan, where Jesus was thought be baptized, is now a highly polluted, depleted, and surrounded by military chain-linked fences. What does that say about our reverence as a body of believers?

But on the hopeful side, the Baptism and the Eucharist show believers that renewal is possible as well, in community. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's slogan is "God's work. Our Hands." In that vein, the synod should prayerfully focus on what would be the greatest needs in their community as the shale gas boom progresses. From my interviews, I saw that service was one of the natural interests of the synods and one of their most established habits. Therefore, as those I interviewed suggest in Chapter 4, the synod might look into starting ministries to reach out to the homeless, the sick, the unemployed, the lonely gas workers, and the fearful. For these social problems, ministeriums can use their existing structures for food banks, home visits, hospital visits, donations, pastoral counseling, neighborly aid, and providing shelter. But they also can use untraditional approaches to address ecological needs, such as river cleans-ups, group water monitoring, air quality

monitoring, recording of health symptoms, replanting of cleared forests, and other types of remediation and watch-guarding efforts. As the resolutions require, they will also be a source of thoroughly researched and trustworthy information for the community about the industry and a place for open conversation about fracking, so that people can make informed decisions before leasing mineral rights, voting for politicians, and lobbying the government for or against regulations.

Additionally, because the human economy is but a “superstructure” to God’s “substructure,” as Rasmussen says,¹⁸⁶ I believe Christian churches in general, and the Upper Susquehanna Synod in particular, have the resources to help their communities envision an sustainable economic revival for rural America – in this case for rural Pennsylvania. The task is to find sources of employment for rural people that are compatible with God’s “substructure,” or the logic of ecosystems and climate. For Rev. Adler, this means investing in clean energy and sustainable agriculture in the region:

My vision is that we need to empower communities to power themselves. Say in Milton, people would learn how to make solar panels and small wind turbines. But that each community would become self-sufficient. So I would love to see the industry of renewable energy come to a place like this. And as to farming, there are a lot of factory farms and that’s a huge problem here. One of my parishioners is a factory farmer. And he’s a good person, I love him. But he’s got a turkey farm, and the environmental effect is bad. But there are some organic farms and I’d love to see more.

This vision is not so far fetched. As Brian Black and Marcy Ladson cite, “Hundreds of wind turbines have been built throughout the state and a number of international manufacturers of wind turbines have made Pennsylvania their U.S. head- quarters.”¹⁸⁷ The windmills in Liberty, pictured below, could be beacons of hope for the community – of a better green energy source than natural gas that leaves the mountains, streams and forest intact.

¹⁸⁶ Rasmussen, 4.

¹⁸⁷ Black and Ladson, 890.

But clean energy alone, without a more fundamental alteration in our industrial, globalized economy will be an incomplete solution. As Christopher F. Jones argues, we need to look back to some of the facets of the “organic economy” that existed before we make the switch to the industrial, fossil-fuel driven commoditization of our culture. Like this organic economy, we must derive our energy from the sun and the wind, rather from non-renewables. But we also have to recognize that in natural systems, God designed the primary transportation of energy to be the biological process of photosynthesis and metabolism.

Therefore, Christians should look toward grounding their economy in this agroecological root, so often described in the Bible. In the synod especially, with its long connection to an agrarian economy, there are many opportunities to revitalize the farming culture and economy that once sustained it. With the increased national demand for local and sustainable food, the Upper Susquehanna Synod could be a source of organic and wholesome crops grown by small farmers who directly source to consumers and therefore make livable wages. The synod can use the lifestyle of its German Lutheran ancestors as a model for how to tie this agricultural lifestyle to the tenets of Christianity, as we explored in Chapter 1. This adds yet another impetus for making sure that fracking pollution does not get into the soil and the groundwater, as the need for pure land and water is critical for a vibrant farming economy.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a request for all Christians in America to show solidarity and fellowship with the people of the Upper Susquehanna Synod – and all those affected by natural gas extraction – for it is unfair to place the full responsibility in their hands.

As Rev. Lehrer wisely comments:

[As Americans] we drive cars that use lots of gas. We keep our houses warm in the winter. We have to ask ourselves, ‘Are we going to use this energy, whether it’s coal, natural gas, or crude oil? Or are we going to try to find a way to conserve it and to share it and to be more responsible about what we are doing?’ Because we don’t have a leg to stand as long as we are in this technological mode together.

Indeed, we are all in this technological mode together, as he says, and our demand for cheap energy is fueling the speed at which these gas companies extract the natural gas in Pennsylvania and in the other states with gas-rich shale. Ergo, when I turn on my clothes dryer, I am complicit in the forces that cause the pollution in the Susquehanna River. Therefore, it is essential that national bodies of Christians stand up for righteousness on the issue of natural gas hydraulic fracturing to show political will. They should also encourage members to use fewer fossil fuels in their daily lives. Christian individuals should do so out of faithfulness to God, the source of our blessings, to whom we owe an ethic of ecological and social care.

These seeds of hope might seem like pipe dreams in the face a challenge as forceful as fracking, yet as Christians we affirm that no task is too big for the Creator. Yes, the whole of creation and humanity has been groaning in trial together for many centuries, as we flounder in our efforts to live as Christ would have us do. But as it says in Romans 8:25: "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." Sittler speaks directly to Lutherans about this passage and how it relates to our ecological future, saying: "To be a Christian is not to know absolutely. It is not to have faith absolutely, not the faith with which we are beheld and beloved. We can never achieve that. Faith, as Luther loved to say, is *fiducia*, trust. It is to stand with the evidence that the God who did what he did [in Christ] is to be trusted in all the obscurities and darkness of this life."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Sittler, 222.

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***The following two resolutions and the memorial are the final copies of what was passed in the Synod Assembly and do not include the clauses that were removed during the debate.**

Appendix A:

Upper Susquehanna Synod of the ELCA, Resolution on Establishing Synod Task Force on Horizontal Slickwater Hydraulic Fracturing; ADOPTED BY THE ASSEMBLY OF THE UPPER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD, JUNE 15, 2012

WHEREAS, God created heaven and earth and everything therein and proclaimed it good (Gen 1:1ff); and God has entrusted humankind with the care of the earth (Gen 2:15); and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has adopted social policy statements, “Caring for Creation” (1993) and “Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood” (1999) that call for economic and environmental justice, to protect the health and integrity of creation both for its own sake and for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations, and for economic justice, to consider how our actions affect the ability of all people to provide for their material needs and the needs of their families and communities; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania contains large subterranean supplies of natural gas in underground rock formations thousands of feet beneath the earth’s surface which require a process known as horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing to extract the gas, and

WHEREAS, the Upper Susquehanna Synod recognizes that there is a wide range of stances on the issue of hydraulic fracturing,¹⁸⁹ and that this issue has the potential to be divisive within the body of Christ,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Office of the Bishop of the Upper Susquehanna Synod establish a task force within the Creation Care Committee charged with the following tasks:

- Undertake a comprehensive assessment of the justice issues surrounding the natural gas industry, including but not limited to ecological protection, public health endangerment, impacts on local communities such as housing, school districts, forced pooling, crime, violence against women, and exploitation of rural and impoverished families;
- Develop and/or acquire and make available materials and resources to address the complexities of horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing for the use of its congregations and affiliated organizations, and
- Provide guidance to congregations and ELCA landowners as they consider decisions pertaining to the use, development, and possible exploitation of their lands; and be it further

¹⁸⁹ The range of stances include those who fully support the industry and believe in its promise of economic benefits and energy independence, those who support strict regulation of the industry, those who are confused by the complexity of the issue, those who are calling for a moratorium on any future drilling until long-range peer-reviewed studies have been conducted, those who are demanding a ban on all drilling, those who are benefitting financially from the industry, and those who are suffering from the effects of hydraulic fracturing.

RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod encourage its members to inform and educate themselves about the issues pertaining to hydraulic fracturing by engaging in

- 1) grassroots conversation,
- 2) the sharing of pertinent stories, and
- 3) workshops and study groups

to discern the theological, moral, and ethical facets of this entire enterprise; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod encourage its rostered leaders to work with their communities to establish responsive leadership to help facilitate discussion and resolve conflicts which may arise as a component of hydraulic fracturing; host community conversations to address issues associated with the process of horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing; and identify and articulate a theological stance to these issues through their preaching, teaching, and personal interaction.

Respectfully Submitted,

The Rev. Leah D. Schade
Pastor, United in Christ Lutheran Church, West Milton

The Rev. Theodore L. Cockley
Chaplain, Buffalo Valley Lutheran Village

The Buffalo Valley Conference
Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA

The West Branch Conference
Upper Susquehanna Synod, ELCA

The Rev. Nathan Baker-Trinity
Pastor, Beaver Lutheran Church

Jennifer Baker-Trinity, Approved Candidate for Associate in Ministry
Beaver Lutheran Church

The Rev. William Henderson
Pastor, Christ's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lewisburg

The Rev. John Yost
Pastor, Christ's United Lutheran Church, Milmont

The Rev. Amanda Range
Pastor, Salem Lutheran Parish, Selinsgrove

Appendix B:

Upper Susquehanna Synod of the ELCA, Resolution on Public Action Regarding Horizontal Slickwater Hydraulic Fracturing; ADOPTED BY THE ASSEMBLY OF THE UPPER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD, JUNE 15, 2012

WHEREAS, God created heaven and earth and everything therein and proclaimed it good (Gen 1:1ff); and God has entrusted humankind with the care of the earth (Gen 2:15); and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has adopted social policy statements, “Caring for Creation” (1993) and “Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood” (1999) that call for economic and environmental justice, to protect the health and integrity of creation both for its own sake and for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations, and for economic justice, to consider how our actions affect the ability of all people to provide for their material needs and the needs of their families and communities; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania contains large subterranean supplies of natural gas in underground rock formations thousands of feet beneath the earth’s surface which require a process known as horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing to extract the gas, and

WHEREAS, the Upper Susquehanna Synod recognizes that there is a wide range of stances on the issue of hydraulic fracturing,¹⁹⁰ and that this issue has the potential to be divisive within the body of Christ,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod convey its concerns about horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing in writing, including a copy of this resolution, to the Secretary of the United States Department of Energy and the Director of the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Commonwealth Representatives and Senators who serve within the territory of the Synod, and other ELCA Synods within the Marcellus Shale region; and, be it further

RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod encourage its conferences, congregations, and members to contact national and state legislators and prompt them to support legislation and policies that:

- Mandate the initiation and timely completion of long-range, comprehensive studies about the cumulative effects of air and water pollution, water resource depletion, public health endangerment, and other possible impacts from the drilling and fracturing processes, with regular reports to the public on findings; and
- Declare a moratorium on the issuing of future permits for hydraulic fracturing until such studies have been completed; and

¹⁹⁰ The range of stances include those who fully support the industry and believe in its promise of economic benefits and energy independence, those who support strict regulation of the industry, those who are confused by the complexity of the issue, those who are calling for a moratorium on any future drilling until long-range peer-reviewed studies have been conducted, those who are demanding a ban on all drilling, those who are benefitting financially from the industry, and those who are suffering from the effects of hydraulic fracturing.

- Mandate full and immediate public disclosure of chemicals used in all stages of the drilling process; and
- Eliminate the signing of non-disclosure agreements by physicians and medical staff, patients, civil suit plaintiffs, workers, and any other individuals whose health has been affected by natural gas drilling; and
- Monitor and reduce any harmful impacts found around existing hydraulic fracturing sites to the fullest extent possible; and
- Protect the rights of local municipalities to maintain their decision-making processes regarding hydraulic fracturing; and
- Develop sustainable energy solutions and increase energy conservation and efficiency in order to reduce the need for fossil fuels.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Same as above]

Appendix C:

Upper Susquehanna Synod of the ELCA, Memorial to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America Churchwide Assembly on Horizontal Slickwater Hydraulic Fracturing - ADOPTED BY THE ASSEMBLY OF UPPER SUSQUEHANNA SYNOD, JUNE 16, 2012

WHEREAS, God created heaven and earth and everything therein and proclaimed it good (Gen 1:1ff); and God has entrusted humankind with the care of the earth (Gen 2:15); and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has adopted social policy statements, “Caring for Creation” (1993) and “Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood” (1999) that call for economic and environmental justice, to protect the health and integrity of creation both for its own sake and for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations, and for economic justice, to consider how our actions affect the ability of all people to provide for their material needs and the needs of their families and communities; and

WHEREAS, 34 states in the United States of America contains large subterranean supplies of natural gas in underground rock formations thousands of feet beneath the earth’s surface which requires a process known as horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing to extract the gas; and

WHEREAS, the issue of horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing is recognized as a highly controversial issue with numerous complexities shaped by regional, state, and local circumstances surrounding the industry and its impact on individuals and communities; and

WHEREAS, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and its predecessor bodies have a long-standing and honorable history of engaging in politically-charged issues¹⁹¹ routinely proclaiming a public theology that takes seriously Jesus’ call to care for “the least of these” (Matthew 25:31-46) and his model of engaging publicly with those who control the power and wealth of a society (Matthew 21:12-13); and

WHEREAS, the ELCA recognizes that there is a wide range of stances on the issue of hydraulic fracturing,¹⁹² and that this issue has the potential to be divisive within the body of Christ, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Upper Susquehanna Synod memorialize the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly to consider establishing a task force charged with the following:

- Undertake a comprehensive assessment of the justice issues surrounding the natural gas industry, including but not limited to ecological protection, public health endangerment, impacts on local communities such as housing, school districts, forced pooling, crime, violence against women, exploitation of rural and impoverished families,

¹⁹¹ Witness Martin Luther, the signers of the Augsburg Confession, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, et al.

¹⁹² The range of stances include those who fully support the industry and believe in its promise of economic benefits and energy independence, those who support strict regulation of the industry, those who are confused by the complexity of the issue, those who are calling for a moratorium on any future drilling until long-range peer-reviewed studies have been conducted, those who are demanding a ban on all drilling, those who are benefitting financially from the industry, and those who are suffering from the effects of hydraulic fracturing.

- Develop and/or acquire resources to address the complexities of horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing for the use of its congregations and affiliated organizations; and be it further
- Develop or make available materials to provide guidance to congregations and ELCA landowners as they consider decisions pertaining to the use, development, and possible exploitation of their lands for the natural gas industry;
- Report back to the 2016 ELCA Churchwide Assembly its findings, and make a recommendation as to the Church's public stance on horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly consider encouraging g the members of the ELCA to inform and educate themselves about the issues pertaining to hydraulic fracturing by engaging in

- 1) grassroots conversation,
- 2) the sharing of pertinent stories, and
- 3) workshops and study groups

to discern the theological, moral, and ethical facets of this entire enterprise; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly consider encouraging its synods, conferences, congregations, and members to contact national and state legislators and prompt them to support legislation and policies that:

- Mandate the initiation and timely completion of long-range, comprehensive studies about the cumulative effects of air and water pollution, water resource depletion, public health endangerment, and other possible impacts from the drilling and fracturing processes; and
- Mandate full and immediate public disclosure and consequent minimizing of chemicals used in the process; and
- Eliminate the signing of non-disclosure agreements by physicians and medical staff, patients, civil suit plaintiffs, workers, and any other individuals whose health has been affected by natural gas drilling; and
- Monitor and reduce any harmful impacts found around existing hydraulic fracturing sites to the fullest extent possible; and
- Protect the rights of local municipalities to maintain their decision-making processes regarding hydraulic fracturing; and
- Develop sustainable energy solutions and increased energy conservation and efficiency in order to reduce the need for fossil fuels; and be it further

RESOLVED, that the 2013 ELCA Churchwide Assembly consider encouraging its rostered leaders to work with their communities to establish responsive leadership to help facilitate discussion and resolve conflicts which may arise as a component of hydraulic fracturing; host community conversations to address issues associated with the process of horizontal slickwater hydraulic fracturing; and identify and articulate a theological stance to these issues through their preaching, teaching, and personal interaction.

Respectfully Submitted,

[Same]

Appendix D: Interview Record

Interview #1:

**Rev. Dr. Robin Vogt; Professor of Ecotheology
Gettysburg, PA; August 3, 2012**

Interview #2:

**Rev. Tom Schumann; Pastor
Mrs. Cindy Schumann; Congregant (Wife of Pastor)
Lewisburg, PA; August 4, 2012**

Interview #3:

**Rev. Nancy Adler; Pastor
Milton, PA; August 4, 2012**

Interview #4:

**Mr. Sam Baurer; Synod Staff; Communications Specialist
Lewisburg, PA; August 4, 2012**

Interview #5:

**Mr. Justin Heinz; Congregant; Gas Worker
Mrs. Donna Heinz; Lay Leader
Mr. Doug Heinz; Congregant Retired Contractor
Avis, PA; August 5, 2012**

Interview #6:

**Mr. Frank Hiland; Congregant; Retired Military Serviceman and Factory Worker
Avis, PA; August 5, 2012**

Interview #7

**Rev. Bernhard Engel; Pastor
Cogan Station, PA; August 5, 2012**

Interview #8:

**Mrs. Becky Loft; Congregant; Hospital Technician
Milton, PA; August 6, 2012**

Interview #9:

**Rev. Allen Kappel; Pastor
Lewisburg, PA; August 6, 2012**

Interview #10:

Rev. Bobby Hahn; Pastor

**Mr. Ed Hoffmann; Lay Leader; Agriculture Extension Agent
Mazeppa, PA; August 6, 2012**

Interview #11:

Rev. Ruth Erikson; Pastor and Synod Staff

**Rev. Jim Erikson; Pastor and Synod Staff
Lewisburg, PA; August 7, 2012**

Interview #12:

Rev. Paul Lehrer; Pastor

Shamokin, PA; August 7, 2012

Interview #13:

Rev. Ted Lowe; Congregant; Gas Worker (Phone Interview)

Milton, PA; August 13, 2012