

# Taking it on faith

*Worcester's spiritual community can lead the way toward a clean energy future*

**A**s people of faith, we are all called in different ways to love our neighbors and to serve that which is higher than ourselves, that which some name "God." What does this have to do with clean energy and electricity?

Though we don't often think about it, every time we use electricity we are polluting the earth, or creation. The electricity that we use comes from power plants. Most of these power plants burn non-renewable fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas. These power plants cause a great deal of pollution and degradation of the earth. They also adversely impact the health and safety of those who live near them. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, power-plant pollution in Massachusetts can be linked to more than 300 premature deaths, more than 8,000 asthma attacks, more than 700 heart attacks, and more than 300 hospitalizations each year. Worcester County was among the dirtiest 10% of all counties in the United States in terms of soot and smog in 1999.

These polluting power plants are disproportionately located in low-income communities and communities of color. This is a phenomenon known as "environmental injustice," and it means that low-income persons face the greatest health threat from our use of electricity.

Do we love our neighbors when our electricity use seriously affects the health of the poor who are the most likely to live near polluting power plants? Do we serve God when our use of electricity defiles our skies, water and land — all of creation?

It is time for us to work toward healthier air and water for our neighbors. It is time for us to act as stewards of the earth. Let us start with this: It is time for the community of faith to support clean sources of energy.

One of the easiest and most effective ways to support clean sources of electricity — electricity produced by tapping into

the power of the wind, sun and water — is to select clean energy suppliers on our Massachusetts Electric bills.

This is easy to do. Massachusetts Electric customers can select clean, renewable electricity suppliers for a small additional cost. For the typical residence, selecting clean energy sources costs \$4 to \$12 a month more. This is less than it costs to go to a movie and buy popcorn, or about the same expense as buying a couple of lattes. It is certainly a small price to pay to help our neighbors and the earth.

This is a particularly good time to select clean electricity because of matching grant dollars from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC). For every dollar that a Worcester resident pays toward clean electricity, MTC will give up to one dollar to the City of Worcester and up to one dollar to benefit low-income communities. These dollars will fund clean energy projects. If 3% of Worcester's households decide to purchase clean energy by the end of June 2005, our city will receive an additional \$100,000 to be used for clean energy projects.

Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light, a non-profit, faith-based ecological organization, is partnering with the Regional Environmental Council and Clean Water Action to encourage residents and the city of Worcester to purchase clean energy. We strongly support their efforts. To learn more about purchasing clean energy, call Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light in Worcester at 508-795-1400 or visit [www.MIPandL.org](http://www.MIPandL.org). You can also contact the Regional Environmental Council at 508-799-9139 or visit [www.recworchester.org](http://www.recworchester.org).

Choosing clean electricity is putting faith into action. Encouraging the growth of clean, renewable electric sources — and ending our dependence on dirty, fossil fuel-burning power plants — is one important step toward environmental justice and care of creation. It is an act of love

and justice toward our neighbors, and for our children. It is, in short, a moral decision. We pray that the Worcester communities of faith will lead the way. □

*This submission was signed by the following members of the clergy.*

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