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The 'Holy Land' of Kentucky and the Bluegrass Pipeline

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Eco Catholic

There's part of Kentucky fondly called the "Holy Land." It's where Maryland Catholics settled in the 18th and 19th centuries after moving westward across the Allegheny Mountains. It probably has more religious establishments per square inch than any rural place in the country. It is home to the Loretto Motherhouse, the Kentucky Ursulines, Kentucky Dominicans, the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and the Abbey of Gethsemani, to name but a few.

Now the counties in this area have been targeted by the Williams company for a project called the Bluegrass Pipeline. The Williams' website says, "We make energy happen." Well, they are certainly raising the energy level among "Holy Land" residents, including those who live at the Loretto Motherhouse.

Not long ago, the Motherhouse community was approached by a representative of the pipeline project to ask if they might build it across Loretto land. The answer was a swift and emphatic no, in spite of the monetary benefits that would accompany the pipeline.

Loretto members also have joined regional organizing efforts to encourage all property owners in the area to say no to the pipeline. The Abbey of Gethsemani also has refused. The other religious orders have not yet been approached.

Why a no? Well, this pipeline would carry explosive, toxic natural gas byproducts through the Kentucky countryside. It would carry huge volumes at high pressure, which could leak into the land or the Ohio River. Moreover, this natural gas comes from fracking operations in Pennsylvania, and fracking has been highly criticized for its use of undisclosed chemicals to extract natural gas. If the natural gas byproducts ever reach the Gulf, they are slated for export overseas to manufacture plastics.

As Susan Classen, a Loretto co-member who lives at the Motherhouse, said about the pipeline, "This was about Loretto and Loretto's sacred land." It's about desecrating the Holy Land of Kentucky.

Worse, a letter from the governor's office in Kentucky claims that the state has little or no oversight for this kind of interstate project, and the same letter allows for the possible use of eminent domain to force property owners to allow access for the pipeline.

Part of the justice mission of Loretto is working to preserve Earth. Stopping such pipelines is a part of this mission.

That's why I personally planned to attend the big demonstration held Saturday in Washington, D.C., against the Keystone XL pipeline, which would bring tar sands oil from Alberta, Canada, to the Gulf.

In addition to the potential dangers posed by spills and accidents, both of these projects move fossil fuels around. If we are to leave a healthy planet for coming generations, we need wind, solar or geothermal, not oil, coal and gas.

Get more information about the pipeline through Kentucky and the Loretto members' response.

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