

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

January 16, 2014 at 4:34pm

Gold mining's effect on the planet

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Eco Catholic

Lucky me. I am in Guatemala for a series of meetings between my community, Loretto, and Sagrada Familia here. Thursday we traveled to La Puya, a mine about an hour outside of Guatemala City. The local villagers have been encamped there for 22 months, prepared to block mining equipment from digging wells and starting operations. Earth studies show that gold and possibly uranium lie under the earth.

But mining would endanger and very possibly destroy the region's water sources, first by using large quantities of scarce water to mine the gold and second by polluting the aquifer. That's why the community had divided itself into 24-hour shifts for almost two years to protect their water.

They are committed to nonviolence. One night a year ago when the army escorted 22 pieces of heavy mining equipment, 4,000 people responded to the call of the watchers to block the army and the equipment.

But here's a thought I'm carrying away with me: The purpose of this destruction of water and massive disruption of human lives in protection of that water is gold. What purpose does gold serve? We have enough stored in Fort Knox, Ky., to make jewelry for the entire human race. And it serves no other purpose.

Paul Krugman wrote an essay exactly about this peculiar behavior, tearing up good land "to add to our dead stock of gold."

All gold does is stand in for labor and manufactured value. You can't eat it. It doesn't keep you warm or protect you from the rain. Gold is as false a value as they come, and in pursuit of gold around the world, from Alaska to Argentina, Guatemala to Papua New Guinea, land is being made uninhabitable by

multinational mining corporations.

Our joint committee met briefly to begin to talk about what we can do to stand with La Puya. We have a lot of ideas, strategies, plans. But the biggest of them all is to challenge the value of gold.

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