

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Contact: Reverend Craig Schwalenberg (607) 287-7906 / revcraig@uuso.org

### **Clergy Bless Waters of New York State as Fracking Decision Looms**

#### **Interfaith Group Presents Resolution; Calls on Gov. Cuomo and Elected Leaders to Ban Fracking**

Cooperstown – On Thursday, September 6, 2012 (12:00 noon, Fenimore Art Museum) clergy from various faiths will gather on the shores of Otsego Lake to bless the waters of New York and pray for the future. The blessing follows the release of an interfaith resolution (attached and available at [www.uujusticeweb.org/hydrofracking](http://www.uujusticeweb.org/hydrofracking)) signed by over sixty religious leaders of different faiths urging Governor Cuomo, legislators, and elected leaders to ban the controversial practice of hydrofracking.

Motivated by news that the Department of Environmental Conservation may soon issue fracking permits, the group has planned an interfaith "Blessing of the Waters" as an invitation for all to join in worship and a time of spiritual commitment to prevent the ruination of our water, air and land in pursuit of temporary gain.

Horizontal high-volume hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") involves the extraction of methane gas from shale rock by injecting large quantities of water and toxic chemicals into the ground under explosive pressure to create fractures in gas-bearing shale. The practice has been linked to contaminated drinking water, air pollution, seismic activity, habitat fragmentation, and human illness.

Convening at the headwaters of the Susquehanna, the interfaith group will highlight the common calling of their faiths to safeguard the earth and its people. "We are entrusted by God to be good stewards of creation and have a moral obligation to prevent harm to others, including future generations who shall inherit the world," says Reverend Elsie Rhodes, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Cooperstown. "Contaminating the aquifer, scarring the earth, and endangering the health of people are not consistent with God's word."

In addition to addressing the inherent dangers of hydrofracking, the interfaith resolution speaks to government ethics, noting that the current political, legal, and regulatory framework in which the fossil fuel industry operates has led to the exploitation of communities, awarding energy corporations with huge financial returns at the expense of people who ultimately suffer long-term health, environmental and economic impacts.

"The Halliburton loophole, compulsory integration, and lax regulations are all results of a political system in which rules are written by industry and corporate profits are put before people," says Reverend Craig Schwalenberg, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Oneonta. "It is time for our elected leaders to find and follow their moral compass."

While focusing on the imminent threat of fracking, signers of the interfaith resolution remain mindful of the need to develop renewable sources of energy, such as wind and solar, as well as the importance of promoting sustainable economies.

"As human beings, we are blessed with creative minds," adds Reverend Judith Thistle, pastor of the Second Baptist Church in Worcester. "Rather than pursuing dangerous new ways of extracting fossil fuels, we should be using our collective wisdom to address human needs while building a sustainable future. We are truly blessed by the earth's abundant beauty and life-sustaining resources. Regardless of our faith tradition, all of us are called to be responsible stewards of those gifts."

The press and public are welcome to attend the "Blessing of the Waters" event at noon on September 6th. Otsego Lake can be accessed without entering the Fenimore Art Museum, via the outdoor walkway on the museum's south side.

###

## An Interfaith Resolution Concerning the Dangers of High-Volume Hydraulic Fracturing

— August 2012 —

**Whereas**, as people of reason and faith, and members of diverse religious traditions, we recognize the blessed abundance of the earth and rich diversity of life that inhabits this world;

**Whereas**, we are all called to be good stewards of the planet we share, which requires that resources of land, air, and water be managed in a responsible and sustainable manner;

**Whereas**, consistent with our faith, we have a moral obligation to prevent harm to our fellow human beings, including future generations who will inherit the earth;

**Whereas**, horizontal high-volume hydraulic fracturing (“fracking”) is a recently-developed technology for the extraction of methane gas from shale rock, involving the injection of large quantities of water or other fluids, toxic chemicals, and proppants into the ground under explosive pressure to create and hold open fractures in gas-bearing shale;

**Whereas**, new information has emerged regarding the significant dangers of fracking, causing independent experts to conclude that the technology poses a serious risk of immediate, long-term, or even permanent harm to land, air, and water resources; said harm occurring through the migration of methane and toxic chemicals into groundwater supplies, airborne gas and chemical emissions, induced seismic activity, disposal of fracking fluids, and the widespread fragmentation of ecosystems and loss of wildlife caused by large-scale proliferation of drilling sites and related infrastructure;

**Whereas**, new information has emerged regarding incidents of contamination and sickness in Pennsylvania and other areas where fracking has occurred, leading medical professionals to question industry claims that natural gas can be extracted safely without endangering human health;

**Whereas**, an industrialized landscape created by the large-scale proliferation of fracking threatens to supplant existing and emerging economies which offer hope for a more sustainable future, protective of the earth and people, including but not limited to locally-owned family farms, wineries, organic agriculture, outdoor recreation, ecotourism, and businesses rooted in the rich history and rural heritage of upstate New York;

**Whereas**, current state law regarding Compulsory Integration can force landowners, who for economic, environmental, medical, or ethical reasons oppose fracking, to allow horizontal drilling and the injection of toxic chemicals beneath their own private property so that gas companies can fracture the earth beneath them and extract natural gas;

**Whereas**, due to the political, legal, and regulatory framework in which the fossil fuel industry presently operates, communities that have been subjected to intense and widespread fossil fuel extraction, including fracking, disproportionately suffer the consequences of extraction through environmental injustice and social-economic exploitation, without equitably sharing in the financial benefits enjoyed by industry; and

**Whereas**, recognizing that natural gas has existed within shale formations since early geologic time and will continue to reside there should alternative technologies be developed for its safe extraction in the future, it is imprudent and morally objectionable to proceed with current methods of fracking in light of the inherent and significant risks posed to the environment, human health, and society.

**Now, therefore** be it resolved by the undersigned clergy, religious leaders, and communities of faith that we:

- § Oppose current methods of horizontal high-volume hydraulic fracturing and support local and statewide bans on use of the technology;
- § Encourage the development of sustainable economies, renewable energy, and conservation measures so that New York State may serve as an example of good stewardship for the earth and an advocate for the well-being of its inhabitants; and
- § Urge our members and colleagues to support this resolution with concrete actions and encourage other communities of faith to join with us in its support.