

## PRAYER

### A Prayer For Healing of the Gulf of Mexico

*May 18, 2010*

*Alex Mikulich, Research Fellow, Jesuit Social Research Institute*

*(Inspired by, and adapted from, the First American "O Great Spirit" Prayer)*

**Opening:** O Great Spirit, Your sacred Gulf water and abundant forms of life sustained by it are now devastated by a massive oil spill that began April 20th. You established with Noah and all generations a new covenant with the earth and every living creature on it to never be destroyed again. Grant us wisdom to understand and mourn this wound to the Gulf today and for subsequent generations to come; we pray for the grace to live by Your covenant with the one creation that is the source of all life.

***We pray:***

That all oil leaks are closed and sealed and oil flow into the Gulf is stopped.

**All: Great Spirit, Help Us find a way to restore beauty to Your Handiwork.**

That the oil that has spilled into the Gulf, wetlands, rivers, and land be cleaned up.

**All: Great Spirit, Help us to listen anew to creation's music.**

We mourn the loss of people and all forms of life destroyed by the oil spill.

**All: Great Spirit, Grant us Wisdom to live in harmony with your creation.**

We pray for healing of the entire Gulf region ecosphere, that the smallest and largest forms of life may find healing from the oil and chemicals dumped into the Gulf.

**All: Great Spirit, Help us to find ways to refresh Your Gulf, bayous, rivers, and lands.**

We mourn the loss of a way of life for all fishing people; may all who find their livelihood through fishing find the comfort and economic support they now need.

**All: Great Spirit, Renew in us a humble gratitude for the fragility of the global biosphere.**

That our nation and world find new ways to humbly reverence the one Mother earth and all forms of life that are nurtured by it—that we may find renewable forms of energy that sustain all forms of life.

**All: Great Spirit, Grant us grace to wonder at the wonder of it all!**

**Closing: (Psalm 96)**

***Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;***

***let the sea and what fills it resound;***

***let the plains be joyful and all that is in them;***

***Then let all the trees of the forest rejoice before the Lord who comes,  
who governs the earth***

***To govern the world with justice and the peoples with faithfulness.***

***In Wonder of One Mother Earth, We pray, Amen!***

## PRAYER ACTION

### A Request for Prayers from Mary Queen of Vietnam Parish, New Orleans, LA for for the people of the Gulf Coast who are struggling to deal with the environmental and social impact of the BP oil spill

Dear Friend,

Last week, a group of Vietnamese-American and African-American residents from my church - Mary Queen of Viet Nam, a member of PICO affiliate Micah Project in New Orleans - won an important victory against BP and other oil and gas companies.

Now we need your help as we continue to oppose unjust corporate practices that are harming families throughout our region. We are asking you to commit to pray for the families in the Gulf Coast Region today.

**As we do our part in this fight, we need to know that our brothers and sisters around the country are supporting us in prayer. [Sign our "Prayer Petition" today. \(http://www.tfaforms.com/159729\)](http://www.tfaforms.com/159729)**

While the BP oil spill continues to wreak both environmental and human disaster all along the Gulf coast, oil and gas companies in the region - including BP - were quietly trying to pass a bill through the Louisiana state legislature that would have limited legal assistance for poor residents who are the victims of precisely the sort of environmental disaster currently facing the region.

At the Senate hearing on the legislation, over 65 members of Mary Queen of Viet Nam and others from New Orleans East presented Senator Ann Duplessis - the Senate Commerce Committee Chair - a letter expressing the community's strong opposition to the legislation, SB549.

After more than two hours of presentations and discussions, the committee unanimously passed a motion to defer the legislation.

This victory will allow organizations like the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic (TELC) to continue helping residents protect themselves from environmental assaults from corporations. While we celebrate this win, New Orleans residents continue to suffer from health hazards and increased toxic exposures from landfills, illegal dumpsites and the recent BP oil drilling disaster.

As Micah community leaders continue our struggle to hold BP and other corporations accountable for creating healthy communities, we need your prayers.

That's why we're asking you to [join us in this fight today by signing our "Prayer Petition"](#) and praying for those of us who live in the Gulf Coast.

Thank you,

Fr. Vien Nguyen  
Mary Queen of Viet Nam Catholic Church  
New Orleans, LA

## ACTION – LEGISLATIVE

### OIL SPILL POLICY BRIEF – MAY 26, 2010

LANO - Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations

[www.lano.org](http://www.lano.org)

IN RESPONDING TO THE Deepwater Horizon rig accident and resulting oil spill, the nonprofit sector demonstrates its ability to deliver essential services, advocate for improvement, and shape public policy. As part of LANO's mission and ongoing work to monitor and inform policy, this brief serves as an overview of proposed federal legislation designed to address the environmental and social needs resulting from the current oil spill disaster. LANO will continue to monitor these proposals, seek input from the nonprofit community, and encourage advocacy on critical items when needed. Additionally, where proposed legislation fails to meet an acknowledged need, LANO seeks to partner with nonprofits to advance lasting policy solutions.

#### *Overview of Oil Spill Related Policies and Proposals:*

**The Obama Administration's Proposed Legislative Package:** The Administration has outlined its main areas of assistance in response to this disaster. These include: immediate funding to the Coast Guard; food safety; monitoring and improving off shore oil exploration; environmental studies; oil spill unemployment assistance; nutrition assistance; employment assistance; one-stop assistance; economic recovery through SBA loans and compensation to fishermen; ensuring BP is compensating people affected by the spill; raising liability caps under the Oil Pollution Act and increasing the excise tax that funds the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund. This proposal seeks to establish the formation of one-stop assistance centers to offer employment assistance and nutrition assistance, and opportunities for nonprofits to apply for federal grants through the Economic Development Administration's Economic Adjustment Assistance program.

**Oil Pollution Act (OPA):** This is the main federal law that imposes liability for damages resulting from an incident like the BP Transocean Deepwater Horizon disaster. BP is deemed the "responsible party" for damages resulting from the continuing oil discharge caused by the disaster. Under OPA, BP's total liability for damage claims is limited to \$75 million. Additionally under OPA, an individual may claim damages for injury or economic losses resulting from the destruction of real or personal property; loss of subsistence use of natural resources, and loss of profits or impairment of earning capacity.

**Big Oil Bailout Prevention Liability Act of 2010 (S.3305):** Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced a bill to amend the Oil Pollution Act that would raise the amount of total liability for damage claims from \$75 million to \$10 billion. LANO PUBLIC POLICY | MAY 26, 2010 Louisiana Association of Nonprofit Organizations | PO Box 66558, Baton Rouge, LA 70896 (225) 929-5266 | [www.lano.org](http://www.lano.org)

**Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA):** In 2007, this bill was signed into law creating a royalty mechanism for states along the Gulf of Mexico to receive a portion of oil and gas lease revenues, starting in 2017. The bill also encouraged federal authorities to ensure that such funds from royalties would be used to restore coastal beaches, wetlands and barrier islands. To date, nearly all oil revenue goes to the U.S. Treasury; once GOMESA begins in 2017, the Gulf Coast states will receive a portion of that revenue to restore and protect the coast. In November, 2005, the State of Louisiana amended the state constitution to dedicate 100% of any revenue sharing from Gulf of Mexico royalties to hurricane protection and coastal restoration.

**Proposed Amendment to the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (H.R.5627):** This bill introduced by Representative Cao (D-LA) would amend the Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act to change the starting date from 2017 to 2011. This would enable Gulf Coast states to begin receiving oil and gas lease revenues 6 years earlier and as a result accelerate repairing the damage caused by the oil spill.

**Oil Spill Claims Assistance and Recovery Act (S.3337):** This bill, introduced by Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), would establish a program to provide technical assistance grants to eligible organizations—including nonprofits—within 60 days after this Act's enactment for use in assisting individuals and businesses affected by the oil spill. The bill allows grant funds to be used to support a wide range of services for individuals or small businesses seeking assistance related to the recovery. The services include education, outreach, intake, language services, accounting services, pro bono legal services, damage assessments, economic loss analysis, collecting and preparing documentation, and assistance in the preparation and filing of claims or appeals.

**Office of Deepwater Claims Compensation (S.3410):** This bill introduced by Senators David Vitter (D-LA) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) would create a federal administrator to resolve claims of victims for economic injury caused by the Deepwater Horizon incident. It would establish an Office of Deepwater Claims Compensation to provide timely and fair compensation on a no-fault basis to persons and state and local governments that have incurred damages.

The bill provides for a claimant assistance program, including assistance for claimants and training for nonprofit organizations and state and local government entities to provide additional assistance. It would also establish multiple resource centers in the Gulf region, located in existing federal offices, to assist with the preparation and filing of claims.

*For questions please contact Elisabeth Gehl, Director of Governmental Relations, at [elisabethgehl@lano.org](mailto:elisabethgehl@lano.org) or 504-309-2081 x317, or Alison Neustrom, Vice President of Public Policy, at [alisonneustrom@lano.org](mailto:alisonneustrom@lano.org) or 225-929-5266.*

## STUDY

### GULF OIL SPILL

#### An unprecedented disaster for the environment, the economy, and the livelihood of Gulf Coast fishing communities

Alex Mikulich, Ph.D, Research Fellow

from the May 2010 edition of *Just South* e-Newsletter of the Jesuit Social Research Institute

<https://app.e2ma.net/app/view:CampaignPublic/id:31385.8325611465/rid:2d20e2cfe0ee0842b6c6db97611f6598>

As the Gulf oil spill of April 20, 2010, continues unabated (as of May 31), the spill is a massive, unimagined, and unprecedented environmental disaster. Although scientists debate the exact amount of oil leaking at the base of the accident site and are uncertain about the exact depth and width of the spill, the spread of the spill threatens damage to the coasts of Louisiana—where it is already beginning to hit—as well as Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida.

In the coming months, and likely much longer, JSRI will monitor the potential impacts of the oil spill on the Gulf Coast states in terms of poverty, race, and migration.

*The Louisiana Weekly* and Advocates for Environmental Human Rights (AEHR) are beginning to assess the potential impacts on fishing communities that are predominantly composed of Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, African-American, Native American, and Hispanic people as well as Cajun, Creole, Croatian, and other former Yugoslavian immigrants.

Gulf coast fishing communities that have yet to recover from Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, Wilma, Gustav, and Ike are not only looking at the loss of jobs and the loss of a single fishing and shrimping season, but quite possibly the destruction of their livelihoods.

In her *Louisiana Weekly* report, Susan Buchanan tells how, just three years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, in 2008, one beacon of hope for fishing men and women was the creation of the Southeast Louisiana Fisheries Assistance Center in Belle Chasse, Louisiana. *The Louisiana Weekly* report, “Gulf oil spill adds to woes of minority fisherman,” by Susan Buchanan is available at <http://www.louisianaweekly.com/news.php?viewStory=2798>.

Created by SeedCo Financial, a nonprofit community development institution that has gained support from corporations, foundations, and the federal government, the Fisheries Assistance Center has lent or granted \$15 million to 545 fisheries and provided business counseling to another 150 fisheries in Southeast Louisiana.

Fifty-five percent of borrowers from the Fisheries Assistance Center are minority-owned fisheries, according to Robin Barnes, a senior vice president at SeedCo. Barnes says that over 27,000 people are employed by fisheries in Louisiana, and that the groups who will likely be most impacted by the loss of business are African Americans and Asians. This is not meant to minimize the detrimental impacts on all Louisianans; rather, it is meant to note that previously disadvantaged groups will bear the brunt of immediate short-term loss of jobs and livelihood.

Monique Harden, co-director and attorney for Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, stresses the relationships between the environment and race, highlighting how the “inherent dangers of the nation’s energy policy are evident in the ghost towns of Louisiana that were once historic African American

communities before petrochemical facilities took root, as well as the massive erosion of Native American ancestral coastal land (about the size of Delaware), due in large part to oil companies cutting channels and installing networks of oil and gas pipelines.”

Harden continues to argue that while “it is a fact that people of color disproportionately pay the price for runaway slicks, coastal land loss, and the significant health problems associated with exposure to massive amounts of toxic pollution, these are not the only costs. Added to these negative consequences of fossil fuel production are greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change, the effects of which are sea level rise and extreme weather events, such as intensive hurricanes. People of color in the U.S. and around the world have the most to lose with climate change.” See Monque Harden’s “Oil Spill Puts People of Color on Slippery Slope” available at [http://www.ehumanrights.org/news\\_release\\_apr30-10\\_slippery\\_slope.html](http://www.ehumanrights.org/news_release_apr30-10_slippery_slope.html).

If British Petroleum is correct in its initial confirmation that up to 5,000 barrels, or 200,000 gallons of oil is spilling into the Gulf each day, this spill will eclipse within 50 days the 11 million gallons spilled from the Exxon Valdez into Prince William Sound in 1989 (See National Public Radio’s “Gulf Oil Could Eclipse Exxon Valdez Disaster” available at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=126373753>).

Ultimately, however, Gulf oil wells hold many times more oil than a single tanker. Given the inability of BP to cap the spill after 35 days, it seems likely this spill may make the Exxon Valdez disaster look relatively small. The first scientific mission to assess the size of the spill (funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration), conducted by the research ship *Pelican*, found massive plumes of oil that were as long as 30 miles, seven miles wide, and hundreds of feet thick (See *Newsweek* “The Great Unknowns in the Gulf Oil Spill,” May 24, 2010, available at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/238367>).

The Gulf oil spill is a case-in-point of the intimate interconnections between the natural environment and the economy. As Pope John Paul II and Catholic social teaching emphasize, respect for all of life, including the global biosphere, is a prerequisite for recognizing human dignity and developing a healthy economy. Catholic social teaching stresses respect for the whole of life and especially for the fragility of the entire web of life sustained by the universe and the global ecosphere.

Simply put, if we lose or irreparably harm the global ecosphere, there will be no human life and no economy, much less a just economy. In his 1990 World Day of Peace message, Pope John Paul II clearly warned that “delicate ecological balances are upset by the uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life or by reckless exploitation of natural resources. It should be pointed out that all of this, even if carried out in the name of progress and well-being, is ultimately to mankind’s disadvantage” (#7). (Available at the Vatican website at [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace_en.html)).

Undoubtedly, due to the physical size of the spill and its toxicity, the threat it poses to local ecosystems may be felt humanly, environmentally, and economically in Gulf South states and region for decades, if not generations to come.