“DARE TO SPEAK”: THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME FROM IDEA TO PROMULGATION (MAY 1973 – FEBRUARY 1975) AND BEYOND

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“DARE TO SPEAK”: THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME FROM IDEA TO PROMULGATION (MAY 1973 – FEBRUARY 1975) AND BEYOND

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“DARE TO SPEAK”: *THIS LAND IS HOME TO ME* FROM IDEA TO PROMULGATION (MAY 1973 – FEBRUARY 1975) AND BEYOND

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This thesis constructs an historical narrative of the writing and promulgation of *This Land Is Home to Me: A Pastoral on Powerlessness in Appalachia by the Catholic Bishops of the Region* (1975). It first investigates ecclesial influences on the pastoral, including Latin American liberation theology and the Second Vatican Council, as well as important social contexts. Such exploration serves as a background for exploring the history of the pastoral, including the idea’s inception, the composition through several drafts, a private meeting between Appalachian bishops and industry leaders, and its ultimate promulgation in February 1975. The thesis then examines the pastoral’s influence on other Catholic Church documents, as well as the lives of individuals and the formation of communities throughout Appalachia, especially West Virginia. Ultimately, although it emerges from a statistically small Catholic region, *This Land Is Home to Me* is important in the history of the Catholic Church in Appalachia and, more broadly, in the United States because the boldness of its message in promoting human dignity spoke to the situation in Appalachia and throughout the country.
Dedicated to the numerous women and men who have heard the call of
This Land Is Home to Me and who have responded
with life commitments to the people and land that is Appalachia
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INTRODUCTION

The same thing which is so obvious in Appalachia goes on outside the mountains. Plain people work hard all their life, and their parents worked hard before them, yet they can’t make ends meet.

This Land Is Home to Me, Part I

“Twenty-four Roman Catholic archbishops and bishops of the 13-state Appalachian region issued a pastoral letter yesterday pledging their support and compassion for the poor and the powerless,” read the Sunday, February 2, 1975 New York Times briefing tucked away on page forty-four, column six. “The 12-page, newspaper-size pastoral was made public at the semiannual meeting of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia held at Wheeling College, Wheeling, W.Va.”¹ The terse five-sentence article offered a skeleton depiction of the promulgation of a document that renowned U.S. Catholic Church historian David O’Brien later heralded as “the finest of

contemporary American documents on social justice.” The promulgation was slated for Saturday, February 1, 1975, intentionally scheduled to be made public just prior to the beginning of the Lenten season during the Holy Year 1975, the year of ‘renewal and reconciliation.’ The Catholic Committee of Appalachia’s (CCA) agenda for their meeting at Wheeling College (now Wheeling Jesuit University) included the meeting, Mass, dinner, and, yes, square dancing, participated in by a couple of bishops, some religious women and men, and some lay people – all members of the CCA.

Their jubilation was warranted; twenty months and eight days prior, an idea originated among a few of them to produce a pastoral letter that would address the injustices of their region. On this cold February day, their vision, hard work, dialogue and collaboration culminated in the official signing and promulgation of *This Land Is Home to Me: A Pastoral on Powerlessness in Appalachia by the Catholic Bishops of the Region*. Bishops Joseph H. Hodges (Diocese of Wheeling, West Virginia) and Michael J. Begley (Diocese of Charlotte, North Carolina and chair of the CCA) officially promulgated the pastoral letter on behalf of twenty-four of their brother bishops in the Appalachian region. Those present realized the workings of the Holy Spirit in the completion of the pastoral; they witnessed an historic event, the signing of a document that would influence the Catholic Church in Appalachia and beyond.

As an undergraduate student at Wheeling Jesuit University (1998-2002), I was introduced to this pastoral letter that the Appalachian bishops promulgated in the lobby of my all female, first-year student residence hall, Sara Tracy Hall. During my time at

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3 February 12, 1975 was Ash Wednesday. Pope Paul VI had deemed that year to be a Holy Year in accordance with the Catholic tradition of celebrating the Holy Year every quarter century.
WJU, I met people whose lives have been permanently influenced by the document: some Jesuits at the college, religious sisters in the southern part of West Virginia, and students and alumni who traveled on breaks to southern West Virginia and eastern Kentucky to chop wood, build homes, or do whatever needed to be done (and that could be done by some unskilled college students and an older, yet youthful Jesuit). In the past few years, I have come to learn and continue to learn the interesting and complex history surrounding the document and its impact on Appalachia and beyond.

**PURPOSE**

The appreciation of the pastoral extends beyond the Appalachian region. Commenting on the First Draft of *This Land Is Home to Me*, Philip J. Scharper, Editor-in-Chief of Orbis Books, perceived the pastoral’s potential “impact on the American church beyond Appalachia.” Jesuit Peter J. Henriot, Acting Director of the Center of Concern (Washington, D.C.), recognized that the pastoral would “give strong testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the region and well beyond it,” calling it an “important effort for justice.” Jason Petosa of the *National Catholic Reporter* wrote that, among other reasons, “the letter is important because…the bishops have spoken in a vigorous prophetic voice in the best Judeo-Christian tradition, and they spoke with unaffected humility.” Archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Brazil attested to the closeness of the

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4 Philip J. Scharper to John Klug, Letter, 30 July 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. Klug gave Scharper a copy of the “First Draft” of *This Land Is Home to Me* during a program held at Georgetown University.

5 Peter J. Henriot, SJ to Bishop Michael Begley, Letter, 10 December 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV, 2-3.

6 Jason Petosa, “Appalachia – challenge and vision,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 28 February 1975, 6. During the process of gathering information for *This Land Is Home to Me*, Petosa participated in one of the
pastoral’s theology to that of Latin America. For a document receiving such high accolades, very little has been written or published on its history, theology and impact.

Consequently, the purpose of this thesis is to construct an historical narrative of the process of formulating and writing This Land Is Home to Me, including its theology and its lasting impact. Questions that drive this research include the following: What theological, ecclesial and social contexts influenced the writing of the Appalachian pastoral? In what ways did the pastoral appropriate or critique such contexts? What was the relationship between the laity and religious working on the process, and the bishops who officially promulgated it in their region? What role did key figures play in the process? What scriptural texts and theological documents informed the pastoral’s theology? What was the methodology of the pastoral? What was the pastoral’s impact then and now, in the Appalachian region and in the larger U.S. context?

Now is an opportune time to collect the history of This Land Is Home to Me into a single narrative. Some of the principle players in this process have already passed, including the first executive director of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia (John Barry) and twenty-four of the twenty-five original signers of the document. Yet many of the key people continue to work for justice in Appalachia and beyond: Les Schmidt (the Task Force leader) and Beth Davies (who conducted twenty-five area dialogues throughout the region with him during Fall 1973-Winter 1974); Joe Holland, the principle author of the pastoral; Bishop Walter Sullivan, an original signer; and countless women and men who moved to the region in response to the document, particularly Sisters

early sounding sessions held in Martin, KY according to a list of people who registered at the sounding sessions, CCA files.

7 See “The Pastoral,” Patchquilt, January 1976, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV. Patchquilt is a quarterly publication of the CCA.
Gretchen Shaffer, SSJ and Kathy O’Hagan, SND. Their collective memory holds more information about the writing process, the pastoral and its impact than can be located in any single written source, and they prove invaluable to reconstructing this history. Without their testimonies, the larger U.S. Catholic community will forget this unique witness of Catholicism’s missionary presence in Appalachia.

OBJECTIVES

Three primary objectives of this study exist regarding This Land Is Home to Me’s contexts, writing process and impact on Catholicism in the U.S. First, the thesis analyzes the theological, ecclesial and social contexts influencing This Land Is Home to Me. Theologically, liberation theology provides a method for doing theology and a lens through which the Appalachian bishops interpret powerlessness in their region. Ecclesially, Vatican II’s understanding of the Church, its social mission and ecumenism, along with the Holy Year’s theme of reconciliation, influences on the writing of the pastoral. Social contexts, such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, the OPEC Oil Embargo, and the American Bicentennial, inform the bishops’ analysis of Appalachia’s situation. Discussion of these contexts provides background information for interpreting the Appalachian pastoral’s emergence in U.S. Catholicism.

Furthermore, this thesis reconstructs the historical events surrounding the process of formulation and authorship, from the idea’s conception to the bishops’ approval of the Final Draft of This Land Is Home to Me. In doing so, the thesis reveals how the Appalachian bishops appropriated theological and ecclesial contexts of the universal Church into their pastoral letter on powerlessness in Appalachia, and how the pastoral
serves as a critique of the social contexts facing the U.S. Two Master’s students, Daniel Braccio (1977) and Brian O’Donnell, SJ (1986), have undertaken partial historical reconstructions in unpublished Master’s theses; however, in-depth research on This Land Is Home to Me has yet to be undertaken and made available to the theological community. Additionally, twenty-five years have passed since anything has been written on the pastoral. Exploring the process of formulating and authoring the Appalachian pastoral reveals how theological, ecclesial and social contexts influence the pastoral.

Thirdly, the thesis will establish the significance of This Land Is Home to Me in Appalachian Catholicism, as well as within Catholicism in the U.S. The pastoral influences other U.S. Church documents by modeling a methodology that would be employed in the writing of other pastoral letters. Furthermore, the Appalachian pastoral is the first document in U.S. Catholic history to be promulgated by regional bishops; other bishops have joined together in issuing collective statements in the decades since This Land Is Home to Me. More fundamentally, the pastoral’s significance lies in the strength of its core message – the promotion of that which is good and beautiful for human life and its flourishing. Their message sent a resounding call throughout Appalachia to take up the struggle of justice. This thesis highlights several individuals and communities who have manifested the essence of This Land Is Home to Me in the past thirty-five years, including educational centers, a land trust, and an ecumenical monastery. Additionally, the thesis assesses limitations to the pastoral’s influence.

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8 Braccio’s work for his Master’s in Religious Education at Fordham University is titled “My Home is Within You: A Study of the Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia by the Catholic Bishops of the Region” (1977); O’Donnell’s work for his Master of Theology at Weston Jesuit School of Theology is titled “Recovering the Dream: The Birth and Reception of the Regional Pastoral Letter This Land Is Home to Me by the Catholic Church in Appalachia” (1986).
Discussion of the Appalachian pastoral’s essential message, influence on subsequent Church documents, and its inspiration for various Appalachian ministries reveals the impact of the pastoral on Appalachian and U.S. Catholicism.

**THESIS**

Though it emerges from a statistically small Catholic region, *This Land Is Home to Me* is important in the history of the Catholic Church in Appalachia and, more broadly, in the United States because the boldness of its message in promoting human dignity spoke to the situation in Appalachia and throughout the country. Evidence of this lies in the appropriation of the pastoral’s methodology and collaborative model by other U.S. Catholic pastoral letters, as well as in the development of a unique strand of the missionary activity of the Catholic Church in Appalachia dedicated to the well-being of Appalachians, especially the poor and powerless. While limitations to its influence exist, *This Land Is Home to Me* remains a landmark document on justice and life in the U.S. Catholic context.

**METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for this project is threefold. Archival work has been done at the West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center (WVCHC) in Wheeling, West Virginia. Their holdings include documents pertinent to *This Land Is Home to Me*, such as copies of early drafts with comments by then-bishop of West Virginia, Joseph Hodges (a native West Virginian), correspondence letters between Bishop Hodges and the CCA, and feedback on early drafts from lay and religious parishioners in West Virginia.
Furthermore, CCA archives held at the Gift of Tears Catholic Worker Farm in Spencer, West Virginia contain materials such as CCA correspondences with the Center of Concern (Washington, D.C.) and efforts to promote the Appalachian pastoral. This archival work will assist primarily in constructing the history in Chapter 2.

Oral-historical analysis will be employed in writing Chapter 2 and Chapter 3. Chapter 2 interviews supplement archival research and include the following: Beth Davies, John Klug, and Jim O’Brien, SJ. Chapter 3 interviews formulate lived responses to the Appalachian pastoral. Gretchen Shaffer, SSJ and Kathleen O’Hagan, SND provide testimony to responding to the call of the pastoral with their 34 years (and counting) commitment to the Big Laurel community in Kermit, West Virginia. Eric Fitts explains the impact of the pastoral on the formation of Bethlehem Farm, a lay community in West Virginia. Informal interviews include Joe Holland and Marie Cirillo.

Thirdly, analyzing theological texts will be useful in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. This includes an in-depth discussion of *This Land is Home to Me* in its three sections, with particular concern for the bishops’ judgment in light of scripture and tradition (section 2 of the pastoral). The thesis explores key texts referred to by the bishops, such as *Justice in the World*\(^9\) and *Gaudium et Spes*\(^10\), in order to understand how the Appalachian bishops situate their regional reflections within the universal church and Catholicism in the U.S.

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*This Land Is Home to Me* dared to speak boldly about the truth of Appalachia’s situation of poverty, calling into questions aspects of the U.S. social context that thwarted

the flourishing of human life in Appalachia. In doing so, it raised awareness about the complicity of the nation in allowing such grave poverty to pervade throughout Appalachia. However, the Appalachian pastoral also spoke more broadly to socio-economic injustices throughout the country. In their analysis, the Appalachian bishops appropriated liberation theology’s methodology and emerging theological understandings from the Second Vatican Council to create a pastoral letter that influenced U.S. and Appalachian Catholicism in the decades following the promulgation. *This Land Is Home to Me* continues to speak justice and truth to the current social situation.
CHAPTER 1

The Pastoral’s Outline, Methodology and Historical Contexts

God has challenged us to take up as holy whatever is good and beautiful in the modern world as in all of creation. But has also challenged us to resist what is evil, especially injustice.

This Land Is Home to Me, Part II

Historical contexts influence the writing of Catholic Church documents, and This Land Is Home to Me is no exception. The Appalachian pastoral directly mentions some historical contexts; others lie in the background in need of illumination for those less familiar with the time period during which it emerges (1970s). This chapter provides an outline of the pastoral as a reference point for the reader. The chapter then delves into the various contexts influencing the writing of This Land Is Home to Me. Theologically, the emergence of Latin American liberation theology directs the Appalachian pastoral’s methodology and analysis of “whatever is good and beautiful” and “what is evil, especially injustice” in Appalachia at the time. Ecclesially, the pastoral’s understanding of Church, social concern, and ecumenism evidences the influence of Vatican II from the previous decade. Additionally, reconciliation emerges from the Holy Year 1975. Socially, the Appalachian Regional Commission, the OPEC Oil Embargo, and the
American Bicentennial provide the backdrop for concern for Appalachian poverty and powerlessness in the Industrial Age. This chapter’s analysis thus will demonstrate the theological, ecclesial and social influences on the authors of This Land Is Home to Me to show how the pastoral is a product of the United States – and not just Appalachian – Catholic experience in the 1970s.

**OUTLINE**

The Appalachian bishops organized This Land Is Home to Me in three parts, with an introduction and conclusion. The pastoral does not imitate the typical style of ecclesial documents. Rather, the writing team appropriated a free verse style, having somewhat of a poetic flow to it; the pastoral’s writing style will be discussed further in the section on the First Draft (in Chapter 2) of this paper.

In the Introduction the bishops specify that the Appalachian pastoral came about as a response by the bishops to the call of the people in the region for the Church to address the present situation of injustice. While acknowledging that viewpoints other than the perspective of the poor exist, the bishops proclaim their duty to take a preferential option for the poor. Part I, “The Land and Its People,” provides a brief history of the region of Appalachia, painting a picture of powerlessness in the face of corporate giants, particularly the coal industry. In Part II, “The Answer of Jesus & His Church,” the pastoral’s presentation of salvation history provides a selective reading of scripture and tradition with this overriding theme: God is a God of the poor; Christ came

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11 Historically, This Land Is Home to Me’s principle author was Joe Holland of the Center of Concern, who was hired by the Catholic Committee of Appalachia. The twenty-six Appalachian bishops provided their feedback throughout the process. Ultimately, twenty-five of those bishops eligible to endorse the pastoral did so. Officially, This Land Is Home to Me represents their collective voice on the situation of Appalachia in the 1970s.
to proclaim good news to the poor; living the gospel demands Christians’ attention to the poor. The section begins:

The Living God,
the Lord whom we worship,
is the God of the Poor.12

The second half of this section highlights the history of eighty years of Catholic Social Teaching, beginning with Leo XIII’s Rerum Novarum (1891), and culminating with the World Synod of Catholic Bishops’ Justice in the World (1971). The consistent call for justice for the economically disadvantaged thematically weaves together this section. In Part III, “Facing the Future: A Process of Dialogue and Testing,” the pastoral sets forth three principles to guide the continued process in the future, ‘closeness to the people; careful use of scientific resources; a steeping in the spirit.’ The bishops offer general recommendations for action, including the formulation of an action plan by the Catholic Committee of Appalachia and the creation of centers for reflections.

The bishops conclude the pastoral with gratitude for those already working in the region, and a poetic exhortation to carry forth. They write,

Dear sisters and brothers,
we urge all of you
not to stop living,
to be a part of the rebirth of utopias,
to recover and defend the struggling dream
of Appalachia itself.

This threefold outline closely parallels the pastoral’s methodology, the subject of the next section.

12 In an effort to communicate the pastoral’s unique style, direct quotations will be presented as they appear in the pastoral.
METHODOLOGY

Latin American liberation theology influenced the Appalachian pastoral’s methodology and theology. This methodology’s roots stem back to Catholic Action, a social movement begun in Belgium in 1912 after World War I by Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967), a priest who sought to organize factory workers and whose efforts found approval by Pope Pius XI. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Latin American liberation theologians, beginning with Gustavo Gutierrez, appropriated and popularized this method. Generally speaking, this theology requires reflection on praxis in light of scripture. Leonardo Boff, an early Brazilian liberation theologian, outlined the three ‘mediations’ or steps explaining ‘how theology is done’ – seeing, judging, and acting. Explanation of this methodology demonstrates how the principle authors of the Appalachian pastoral appropriated this method in their writing.

In the first step of seeing, the theologian experiences poverty: “This is an overall experience of compassion, of protest, of mercy, and of a will to liberating action.” With such a starting point, the liberation theologian must “go into the ‘examination hall’ of the poor” and experience poverty first hand. Next, one seeks to understand poverty and the poor. Liberation theology equates poverty with oppression, understanding poverty “as the product of the economic organization of society itself, which exploits some – the workers – and excludes others from the production process – the underemployed,

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13 The Appalachian pastoral’s principle author Joe Holland notes that this methodology can be observed in papal encyclicals dating back to the 18th century. Joe Holland, “Making All Things New,” Keynote Address at the Catholic Committee of Appalachia’s Annual Meeting celebrating its 40th Anniversary, (Hinton, WV, Sept. 2010), author’s personal notes.
unemployed, and all those marginalized in one way or another.”

As for the poor, liberation theology’s understanding includes the socio-economically poor as the basic level, yet also keeps in mind those who are racially, ethnically and/or sexually oppressed.

In the second step, judging, theologians reflect on this understanding of poverty and make a judgment in light of the Christian faith. According to liberation theology, Christian scripture and tradition “condemn this situation of poverty as sin; that is, as something that has to do with God, insofar as it denies the historic realization of God’s design, which goes by way of the mediation of justice, of kindness toward the poor, and of participation and communion.” In other words, it distinguishes “whatever is good and beautiful” from “what is evil, especially injustice.” Liberation theology’s primary sources include prophetic scriptural texts and the Gospels, people in tradition such as Catherine of Siena and Bartolomé de Las Casas, and the Church’s social teaching.

Collective action based on judgment characterizes the third and most crucial step. As Boff writes, “Liberation theology…starts from action and leads to action, a journey wholly impregnated by and bound up with the atmosphere of faith.” Thus the Christian community acts to ameliorate the situation of the poor, taking responsibility for transforming and liberating society. To these Boff adds a fourth moment – celebration that anticipates the realization of God’s Reign.

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16 Ibid., 26.
17 Ibid., 29.
18 Boff, Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, 109.
19 Boff and Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, 39.
20 Boff, Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor, 110.
In *This Land is Home to Me*, the Appalachian bishops appropriated liberation theology’s threefold method – see, judge, act – in developing Appalachian contextual theology. In Part I they ‘saw’ the situation by listening to the voices of the Appalachian people and by observing for themselves. In a meeting regarding an early draft of the pastoral, Bishop Walter Sullivan of the Diocese of Richmond “indicated that he couldn’t believe people of Central Appalachia lived in such poverty until he personally visited the western portion of his Virginia diocese.”

Similarly Bishop Begley of Charlotte visited the striking Brookside Coal Mine in Harlan County early in 1974. His response represents the essence of this first step. In Part II, the bishops interpreted the situation of Appalachia in the 1970s in light of the sacred scriptures and the social teachings of the church, as noted above. In Part III, they recommended guidelines for actions.

This appropriation of liberation theology is intentional. Les Schmidt, a Glenmary priest and chairperson of the pastoral committee for the CCA, understood that “the same analytical tools and insights which emerged from the struggle of the Third World countries could be applied to the present Appalachian situation.” Additionally, many involved in the pastoral’s process recognized similarities between the situation in developing countries and the situation in Appalachia. For instance, Bishop Joseph H. Hodges of the Diocese of Wheeling (West Virginia) recounted “the experience of an

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21 “Preliminary Bishops Consultation on Proposed Appalachian Pastoral,” 11 October 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. In 1973, Pope Paul VI designated the territory belonging to the Diocese of Richmond; previously, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (WV) included part of that territory. Sullivan served as Bishop of Richmond from Jul. 1974 until retiring in Sept. 2003. He is the only living original signer of *This Land Is Home to Me.*

22 Fr. John Barry to Bishop Vincent Leonard, Letter, 28 February 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.

African missioner who came to West Virginia to find a degree of poverty which he had never seen in Africa.” Schmidt thus invited Joe Holland, then-staff member at the Center of Concern (Washington, D.C.), to take the lead in writing the pastoral. Holland agreed, “intrigued with the linkage of an international application to a national setting.” In a letter sent to taskforce leaders, Holland proposed “a structural model for document-development, one taken from the model of the document of the 1971 World Synod of Bishops Justice in the World, a model which draws on similar documents from the contemporary Latin American Church.” The taskforce approved his proposal; consequently, the Appalachian pastoral follows the threefold structure: ‘structural analysis of the situation’; ‘meditation upon the Gospel message and on the mission of the Church in light of the analysis’; ‘action recommendations flowing from meditation on the analysis.’ Holland furthermore explained how this model differs from previous Catholic social teaching documents: “Here, the illumining principles proceed from our meditation on the Word of God as disclosed in contemporary human experience, seen against the horizon of our tradition’s experience,” rather than beginning with principles which are applied to experience. As is evident, liberation theology guided the methodology and the theology of This Land Is Home to Me.

24 “Preliminary Bishops Consultation on Proposed Appalachian Pastoral.”
26 Joe Holland, “A Dialogue-Focuser for Use in Area Meetings in the Development of a Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia,” undated, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV, 4. Please note: a handwritten note under Bishop Hodges’ signature on the first page provides the dates of March 25 or 16, 1974; this is potentially the date received or the date filed.
27 Ibid., 3.
28 Ibid., 4.
ECCLESIAL CONTEXTS

As part of the universal Church, the Catholic Church in Appalachia embodied much of the sentiments present in the life of the Catholic Church throughout the world. The Appalachian bishops promulgated *This Land is Home to Me* only a decade after the closing of Vatican II. Some of these bishops, such as Richard H. Ackerman of Covington (Kentucky), William G. Connare of Greensburg (Pennsylvania) and James J. Hogan of Altoona-Johnstown (Pennsylvania), attended the council. Pope John XXIII, who opened the council, appointed some such as Connare, Hogan and Hodges (West Virginia), to their position as bishop. Pope Paul VI, who closed the council, also appointed several signers of the Appalachian pastoral to the rank of bishop, including Joseph Bernardin of Cincinnati (Ohio), Michael Begley of Charlotte (North Carolina), Edward Head of Buffalo (New York), David Cunningham of Syracuse (New York), Joseph Daley of Harrisburg (Pennsylvania), Joseph Durick of Mobile (Alabama), and Edward Hermann of Columbus (Ohio). Furthermore, in the timing of their promulgation, the bishops and others involved in the Appalachian pastoral interpreted their task in light of the Lenten season in the Holy Year of Reconciliation (1975). The Second Vatican Council’s understanding of Church, its social mission and its relationship to other Christian denominations, as well as themes of reconciliation and repentance, exuded influence on the bishops, religious and laity involved in the writing of *This Land Is Home to Me.*

*The Second Vatican Council*

Echoing Pope John XXIII’s call for the Holy Spirit at the opening of the Vatican II, the Appalachian bishops wrote,
We know that if this renewed presence can mature into a convergence with the thirst for justice, a new Pentecost will truly be upon us.

On Vatican II’s call, Bishop Begley, first chairperson of the CCA and Bishop of Charlotte, wrote, “We are living today within a changing Church. The directives of Vatican II require us to be concerned about social issues. Laity – the People of God – together with clergy and in union with CORA, are anxious to help reduce powerlessness among all people of the area. Prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit must be continuous so that even ‘the hard sayings’ of the Good News will be proclaimed and accepted.”

Three themes emerge from this quotation: an understanding of Church, the social mission of the Church, and ecumenism. Each theme will be treated below, in relation to the local ecclesial context.

The Nature of the Church

In calling the laity ‘the People of God,’ Begley employed the language of Lumen Gentium (LG), Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (1964), which provided a new model of being Church. This model recognized equality and unity among Church members. According to LG, “The chosen People of God is one: ‘one Lord, one faith, one baptism,’ sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity” (4.32). Furthermore, the document calls both the laity and the clergy to lives that are holy, characterized by the theological virtues.

of faith, hope and love. According to LG, “Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his [sic] own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity” (5.41). This conciliar teaching regarding the universal call to holiness and the mood it inspired is central to the existence of This Land Is Home to Me.

Original-signer Bishop Walter Sullivan’s reflections on the Church in Appalachia following the pastoral are indicative of this mood. He wrote, “With the new insight into the nature of Church and our responsibility to discern the ‘signs of the times,’ the Church began to be present in Appalachia in a new and somewhat unique way.” According to Sullivan, Church began to listen, to learn, to see the need for liberation, to love in a new way, and to link what was happening in Appalachia with colonialism in other parts of the world. Regarding listening, he stated, “The Church has begun to focus more on the depth of its listening rather than the degree to which it is being heard by others.” Sullivan’s thoughts characterized the mood created by the Council more than its actual words. LG is very clear that the bishops hold the teaching authority within the Church, ‘to sanctify, govern and teach’ (3.21). Nevertheless, the mood it created by acknowledging the giftedness of the laity enabled the bishops to trust the Spirit and assume a listening posture. Of course, the bishops had the final say in the draft. But the process from start to finish and to its implementation witnessed to collaboration among the bishops, the laity, and non-Catholics. The bishops acknowledge this in the first words of the pastoral:

Many of our Catholic people especially church workers

31 Ibid.
have asked us to respond
to the cries of powerlessness
from the region called Appalachia.
We have listened to these cries
and now we lend our own voice.

Such an opening statement is possible due to the new understanding of the Church and the relationships among its members.

**The Church’s Social Mission**

Begley’s ‘concern for social issues’ and Sullivan’s ‘signs of the times’ echoed the Council’s Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). The pastoral quoted from the opening of this document in the social encyclical tradition: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (*GS* 1). In *This Land Is Home to Me*, the bishops identified ‘the joys and the hopes’ of Appalachia’s powerless as their own in their call to ‘defend the dream of the mountain’s struggle.’ Regarding this task, CCA Executive Director John Barry wrote, “The region is extensive; the problems and challenges are many. We can trust the Lord to help us all be the Church in response to the world’s needs.”

Their understanding of the Church’s mission enabled them to take on the task of writing the Appalachian pastoral.

The 1971 document by the Synod of Bishops *Justice in the World (JW)* further expresses the social mission of the Church. The Appalachian pastoral quoted from the clear statement expanding upon the Church’s mission in the world: “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a

32 Fr. John Barry to Bishops of Appalachia, Letter, 8 February 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or, in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation” (JW 6). While not explicitly articulated, this understanding of the Church’s role in liberation and transformation undergirds the pastoral’s ecclesiology. *Justice in the World* is chronologically the last of ten Church documents that the bishops mention or quote from in giving credibility to their present message.

Indeed, the spirit of the pastoral letter is in the Church’s social tradition. As Church historian David O’Brien comments,

The Appalachian pastoral constitutes an authentic American response to the documents of the magisterium on social justice and world peace. It relates the categories of those documents and the scriptural language of the emerging social theology to the concrete lives and words of a distinct people. Like the documents of the magisterium, it seeks to highlight a need, touch the conscience, call all persons to action."^33

But, as he points out, concern for poverty was not new among U.S. Catholics.

The Catholic Worker movement undergirded the writing of *This Land Is Home to Me* in the pastoral’s style of concern for the poor and its written form. The Great Depression gave rise to the need to respond to grave economic suffering. Dorothy Day (1897-1980), along with Peter Maurin (1877-1949), spurred this movement, establishing houses of hospitality and farms in urban areas such as New York City and in rural areas like West Virginia, as well as producing the newspaper *The Catholic Worker*. Day’s concern for workers in Appalachia can be traced to the first publication of *The Catholic Worker* on May 1, 1933, which “ran articles condemning child labor, racial inequality and the plight of West Virginia coal miners.”^34 In the years leading up to the

[^34]: Deborah Kent, *Dorothy Day: Friend of the Forgotten* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 74.
Appalachian pastoral, some CCA members, such as Chuck Smith who would later chair the CCA, were active in the Catholic Worker farms in West Virginia. Initially, members of the Catholic Caucus of the Commission on Religion in Appalachia (CORA) named their group the ‘Catholic Workers in Appalachia.’ Bishop Hodges of West Virginia served as the coordinator of the organization under this name, which would later become the CCA.

The ministerial style of many lay and religious CCA members showed Day’s spirit of accompanying the poorest of the poor in their struggles and advocating alongside of them for justice. Additionally, the poetic style of This Land Is Home to Me is reminiscent of Maurin’s Easy Essays, written in free verse style accessible to the average reader. For the same purpose of accessibility, the bishops distributed the Appalachian pastoral in large newspaper print for five cents, similar to The Catholic Worker. The five-year anniversary reflection booklet on the pastoral pictures an aged Day reading the newspaper format version of This Land Is Home to Me.

The Catholic Worker connection remains to this day. The current secretary of the CCA is Jeannie Kirkhope, who lives at the Gift of Tears Catholic Worker farm in Spencer, West Virginia. This farm was founded in 2002 as a “faith-based, seamless garment Catholic Worker Farm attempting to meet the challenges of the Appalachian Bishops’ two Pastors.” That site held the official CCA files until 2010. Clearly the

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35 “Report on Meeting of Catholic Workers in Appalachia,” 1 October 1969, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
37 The CCA archives presently are held at the Monastery on Mount Tabor in Martin, KY. Sr. Mary Going is the present CCA archivist.
history of the Catholic Worker’s advocacy for the poor influenced the writing of *This Land Is Home to Me.*

Ecumenism

In addition to teachings on the laity and on social mission, the Church reassessed its understanding of ecumenism during the Council. Regarding the various Christian denominations, *LG* reads, “We can say that in some real way they are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power” (2.15). Such ecumenical awareness finds fuller expression in the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964).

This shift towards greater ecumenical cooperation on the part of the Catholic Church undergirds the pastoral on numerous levels. The group responsible for the pastoral would become known as the Catholic Committee of Appalachia. This group started as the Catholic caucus of the seventeen-denomination Christian group called CORA, the Commission on Religion in Appalachia. CORA has its roots in the 1960s as a form of home missionary work. Arleon L. Kelley described the foundational goals of CORA: “In 1966 the Commission stated its organizing purpose in these words: ‘In the name of Jesus Christ, to engage the resources of the communions and other agencies in activities designed to meet the pressing human needs of the people of Appalachia.’ By 1967 it was clear that this meant that CORA’s intention was to address issues of poverty and building community in Appalachia.” Catholics were active in this group from the outset. Funded by various Catholic dioceses, the CCA paid annual dues to CORA. The

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CCA contributed $3000 in 1969, $4000 in 1970, $5000 in 1971,\(^{39}\) and $5500 in 1973.\(^{40}\) Such ecumenical collaboration by the Catholic Church in Appalachia was and is very important given the region’s mostly Protestant demographic.

Due to growing membership, the CCA eventually formed its own group, while many members remained involved in CORA. In 1976, then-CCA chair Chuck Smith described the CCA as “a loosely organized group which works with the bishops of the region to increase church awareness of the characteristics, quality of life and problems which are uniquely Appalachian.”\(^{41}\) This group’s ecumenical sensitivities and appreciation proved to be key to the success of the process.

In speaking of powerlessness in Appalachia, many of the people the bishops spoke of were not Catholic, whereas many of the coal operators – the powerful – were Catholic. Hence, the process included area dialogues throughout Appalachia where Catholic and Protestant alike were heard; it also included dialogue with wealthy, Catholic industry leaders. Furthermore, the bishops addressed the pastoral, in the spirit of Vatican II, ‘to the Catholic people and to all people of good will’ and encouraged further dialogue. They write,

> Hopefully, this letter, itself a product of dialogue, will start a process, wherein the Catholic community can join together with people of good will throughout the region to reflect on and act for a more just society.

\(^{39}\) “Catholic Committee of Appalachia,” undated, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.  
\(^{40}\) “Catholic Committee of Appalachia Financial Statement,” 1973, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.  
It should be noted that the unity sought by ecumenical collaboration was for the purpose of working for justice in the region. The goal was not to move towards convergences and agreements regarding theological differences. Still, the pastoral letter’s intentional ecumenical spirit was significant and reflected the mood set by the Second Vatican Council.

_The Liturgical Year 1975_

In addition to the bishops grounding themselves in the teachings of the universal Catholic Church, the bishops also incorporated the rhythms of the Church’s liturgical cycle into the process of formulation and promulgation. _This Land Is Home to Me_’s promulgation date during the Holy Year evidences this.

In a general audience on May 9, 1973, Pope Paul VI declared that 1975 would be deemed a Holy Year, the first since 1950. In calling for a Holy Year, Paul VI participated in a tradition dating back to Pope Boniface VIII who began the tradition in the year 1300 as a way of celebrating the Jubilee described in Leviticus. The pope inaugurated the Holy Year with a solemn ceremony on Christmas Eve 1974, tapping on the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica three times with a silver hammer, and walking through the doors which had not be opened in twenty-five years. The pope chose ‘renewal and reconciliation’ with God and among Christians and all peoples as the theme for the Holy Year. In his World Peace Day message, the pope exhorted: “Reconciliation! Young men and women, strong men and women, responsible men and women, free men and women, good men and women - will you think of it? Could not this magic word find

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a place in the dictionary of your hopes and of your successes?" Catholocs celebrated the Holy Year with pilgrimages and prayers throughout the year.

The bishops and others involved in the process comprehended the task they were undertaking in light of the Holy Year’s theme. In his letter to all bishops accompanying the dissemination of the First Draft in April 1974, Bishop Begley wrote, “Recalling that 1975 has been set aside by the Holy See as the Holy Year, “Reconciliation,” this pastoral] could serve as our collective preparation toward that responsibility.” Some responding to the draft concurred that the pastoral’s aim was to bring about reconciliation. Sr. Anne Regina O’Leary SSJ, for instance, wrote, “As intended, the Pastoral Letter is [sic] a dialogue with people, an expression of the Good News, and a sign of hope and reconciliation. It comes at an appropriate time as we reflect on the theme of reconciliation in the Holy Year.”

A person well aware of the need for reconciliation in the region was Bishop Hodges of West Virginia. His state was the only one entirely within the Appalachian regional boundaries and, furthermore, was dependent on the coal industry being criticized in the pastoral. As his members were among the powerless and the powerful, Hodges delicately balanced the concerns of both, while remaining wedded to the truth. Hence, he was concerned both with reconciliation and credibility of content.

44 Bishop Michael J. Begley to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 15 April 1975, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
45 Anne Regina O’Leary, SSJ, “Comments on ‘This Land Is Home to Me,’” undated, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. O’Leary served as the President of the U.S. Federation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, at the time. For a brief biography of this remarkable woman, see “Sister Anne Regina O’Leary Celebrates 75th Jubilee” www.ssjwhg.org/75th_jubilee.htm (accessed Feb. 22, 2008).
His response to Begley regarding the First Draft is telling. In it Hodges critiqued the somewhat exaggerated tone of the First Draft. He wrote, “We seek a tone which is reflective of the Sermon on the Mount – challenging, hopeful, reconciling.” He then listed “specific criticisms regarding the pastoral’s content which lead to unnecessary division or to loss of credibility in our message.” He concluded by saying that “we have been encouraged to continue the development of the Pastoral, but to remain mindful that our role is to build bridges between the oppressed and the oppressor, between the individual and the institution, between man [sic] and his Creator.” Hodges’ statement clearly reflected Pope Paul VI’s message of the Holy Year’s theme, reconciliation with God and humans, and represented a genuine desire of his. If the writing team did not heed this desire, they would threaten to thwart the success of the Appalachian pastoral.

Ultimately, the bishops delicately undertook the task of reconciliation. While making ‘the joys and the griefs’ of the ‘poor and afflicted’ their own, the bishops attempted not to push out the ‘oppressors’ but to convince them with credible content to participate in a renewed and reconciled relationship between the worker and the owners. As Jason Petosa of the National Catholic Reporter wrote, “(The bishops) are careful not to burn bridges to the economic and political interests with whom the poor will contend for power. Besides being a practical necessity, this posture also reflects an idealistic but superbly Christian point of view. For it is a corollary to God’s call to people that people

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46 Bishop Joseph H. Hodges to Bishop Michael J. Begley, Letter, 27 June 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
47 Ibid., 2.
48 See Ch. 2 of this thesis for further discussion.
can indeed change their ways.”

The bishops knew that reconciliation that would transform the present order could be possible.

Additionally, the bishops planned to promulgate the pastoral at the start of Lent, the season of reconciliation with God and humanity. In the same letter quoted above, Hodges wrote, “An excellent suggestion has been to issue the pastoral at the beginning of Lent in 1975, as a concrete expression of how we can continue forward from this year’s theme of ‘Evangelization in the Modern World’ and into the next year’s theme. The bishops, with the CCA Taskforce, implemented this suggestion to time the pastoral’s promulgation with the liturgical season of Lent.

The Appalachian bishops promulgated *This Land Is Home to Me* on February 1, 1975 of the Holy Year of Reconciliation, less than two weeks before Ash Wednesday, February 12, 1975. The pastoral then was made public during the Lenten season. On February 13, the full-text of the pastoral appeared in *Origins*; on February 14 and 28, the *National Catholic Reporter* published two articles by Petosa on the pastoral; on February 21, *The Catholic Virginian* published the pastoral in full with some of the original artwork. More than forty other diocesan papers did likewise. By timing *This Land Is Home to Me* with the Lenten observance of repentance and reconciliation during the Holy Year, the bishops issued a resounding ‘call to action’ on the part of all who hear the cry of the poor. As they wrote in the Introduction,

> Their cry is a strong message, not because we have made it that way,

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50 Bishop Joseph H. Hodges to Bishop Michael J. Begley, Letter, 27 June 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. Begley previously has suggested this to Hodges in a letter dated Apr. 15, 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center.
51 “Special Thanks to Bishops of Appalachia,” *Patchquilt*, April 1975, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
but because the truth of Appalachia is harsh.
In repeating this message we do not put ourselves in judgment of others.
The truth of Appalachia is judgment upon us all,
making hard demands on us bishops, as well as on others.

The bishops’ careful intentionality in timing their promulgation is part of what makes this document so remarkable.

The Second Vatican Council and the Holy Year of Reconciliation influenced those responsible for the production of *This Land Is Home to Me*. The bishops appropriated key themes from the universal Church into the context of Catholicism in Appalachia. Similarly, social contexts of the 1970s United States influenced why this group of Appalachian Catholics decided to respond in an official Church document to the injustices plaguing Appalachia.

**SOCIAL CONTEXTS**

The historical scene of the United States in the 1970s provides the context for understanding what motivated the bishops to respond so boldly to the needs of Appalachians. In the 1960s, the formation of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) solicited national attention towards Appalachian poverty. In the bishops’ view, the impending OPEC oil embargo threatened to push Appalachians into greater poverty and even less control of their lives. Furthermore, the bishops perceived the lack of Appalachian power and independence as ironic in light of the nation’s preparations for celebrating 200 years since its Declaration of Independence from Great Britain. The
ARC, the OPEC oil embargo and the American Bicentennial thus motivated the bishops to challenge the poverty so blatant in Appalachia.

Appalachian Regional Commission

In 1960, due to region-wide economic issues, the governors of Appalachia banded together to form the Conference of Appalachian Governors.\textsuperscript{52} In 1961, this group petitioned President John F. Kennedy for federal assistance in alleviating poverty conditions and stimulating economic growth. Kennedy responded by forming the President’s Appalachian Regional Commission (PARC) in 1963, a cooperative federal-state commission charged with studying the region. Upon Kennedy’s assassination, Lyndon B. Johnson assumed the presidential office, continuing PARC as part of his ‘War on Poverty.’ In April 1964, PARC provided Johnson with a report of their findings. This report formed the basis of legislation that Johnson proposed to Congress later in 1964 and that Congress passed in early 1965. On March 9, 1965, the Appalachian Regional Development Act became law.\textsuperscript{53} At the time of this law’s passing, one-third of Appalachians lived in poverty.\textsuperscript{54}

The concern for poverty in Appalachia by these two presidential administrations brought national attention to the conditions of the region. The Catholic Church, too, became more cognizant of the situation of economic despair in Appalachia as it came to the “gradual realization that poverty was part of the American experience.”\textsuperscript{55} This Land

\textsuperscript{52} States partially within Appalachia include: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia and all of West Virginia.


\textsuperscript{55} David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon, eds., 469.
*Is Home to Me* responded to these conditions of which the Church was increasingly more aware. Furthermore, the pastoral referenced the Appalachian Regional Commission’s 1972 Annual Report to describe the region’s boundaries and to introduce the prospect of ‘economic development’ in the region. Regarding the boundaries (which are still operative today), the bishops wrote,

The Appalachian mountains form the spiny backbone of the Eastern United States. This whole stretch, which the Federal Government calls "The Appalachian Region", runs from Southern New York to Northern Georgia and Alabama. It contains 397 counties in 13 states, parts of
- Alabama,
- Georgia,
- Kentucky,
- Maryland,
- Mississippi,
- New York,
- North Carolina,
- Ohio,
- Pennsylvania,
- South Carolina,
- Tennessee,
- Virginia,
and all of West Virginia.

The bishops appeared to be skeptical of economic development’s benefits on the regional people; nevertheless, the national attention focusing on Appalachian poverty in the 1960s influenced the existence of the pastoral.
In October 1973, the Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an oil embargo on the United States because of its military support of Israel during the Arab-Israeli War. This created an oil shortage in the US, and forced politicians and corporations to think seriously about ‘energy independence.’ At the time, there was serious concern that the oil and coal companies would turn more heavily to coal produced in the US, primarily in the Appalachian region, but also out west in places like Wyoming. The bishops were aware of this situation. In a section in Part I entitled “Back to the Mountains,” they wrote,

So the corporate giants turn their eyes to the mountains once again…

Already voices from this camp have spoken of Appalachia as an "energy reservation", or "giant industrial park".

Appalachia, a field of powerlessness, may soon become the seat of economic power in the United States.

Increased national dependence on Appalachian coal might be advantageous for regional coal workers, but as the UMWA cautioned in their 1973 annual report, such increased dependence could have posed a danger to worker safety as more coal was extracted more quickly. The bishops lent their voice of caution as well. From their perspective, the coal miners and the towns in Appalachia would not benefit from this move. They wrote,

But the new power, which a return to coal could bring to Appalachia, would probably not make its people any more powerful.
Instead, they would live
a different kind of powerlessness,
one common to the rest of our society
the powerlessness of isolated little people
in the face of the most powerful corporate giants
on this earth.

The history of coal in the region and the general, though not total, lack of concern for the
land and its people warranted the bishops concern for the fate of Appalachia. John Klug, Director of the Office of Social Justice in the Diocese of Wheeling, called the
Appalachian people “pawns in a game called ‘Energy Independence’…because our
nation’s goal of energy independence and the heavy reliance on coal does not include in
the game plan any consideration for either the land or the people of Appalachia.”

The Buffalo Creek Flood of 1972 served as an example of the negative impact of coal and
powerlessness of the people.

In 1972, three coal dams at Buffalo Creek, West Virginia broke after heavy rains,
releasing 130 million gallons of slurry, a toxic by-product from the process of cleaning
coal. The slurry filled the valleys and streams, killing 125 people, injuring 1100 and
leaving 4000 homeless. The flood’s sheer human and ecological tragedy demanded the
attention of the local leaders and required them to speak out on behalf of the people of
their region. Furthermore, the owner of the impoundment, Pittston Coal Company,
denied responsibility for the flood, even though officials knew 24 hours prior that the
dams were weakening. An anonymous lawyer for Pittston told the Charleston Gazette

(West Virginia) in the time immediately following the tragedy that the flood was “an act of God.”58 The people of the area thought otherwise.

Such irresponsible mining practices justified the bishops’ hesitation about the country’s potential increased dependence on coal. As it turns out, the OPEC oil embargo ended in March 1974, and ‘energy independence’ has yet to be achieved, which is evident in the present (over) use of the phrase in political rhetoric. Still the oil crisis was present in the minds of those writing the pastoral.

*The American Revolution Bicentennial, 1976*

In 1976, the United States celebrated two hundred years since the Declaration of Independence in 1776. In preparation, the United States Catholic Conference established a Bicentennial Committee to study the areas in which ‘liberty and justice for all’ had yet to be achieved. The Appalachian bishops interpreted their preparations for *This Land Is Home to Me* in light of this. As John Barry explained, “We have Appalachian representation on the NCCB Committee for the Bi-Centennial. Moreover, I have been in on-going contact with Fr. Hehir and Mr. Butler, so as to tie in our pastoral with the Bi-Centennial plans.”59 Part of this included participation in a Bicentennial Panel hearing in August 1975 during which citizens from around the country presented local injustices suffered by Americans. John Klug, Director of the Office of Social Justice (Diocese of Wheeling) presented to the panel on the topic of ‘citizen control’ (or, rather, lack there of) in Appalachia based on *This Land Is Home to Me*. In his perspective, the people of

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59 Fr. John Barry to Bishops of Appalachia, Letter, 19 September 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
Appalachia “will celebrate the 200th Anniversary of our freedom, watching the coal trains leaving full and returning empty to a land that no longer belongs to the people.”⁶⁰ He was one of several, including sugar cane workers from Louisiana, to present to the bishops.⁶¹ In light of the poverty and powerlessness plaguing Appalachia, the celebration of the country’s liberation from the British drew the attention of the bishops.

The original artwork and quotations throughout the first publication of *This Land Is Home to Me* were the most visually telling expression of the Bicentennial’s influence on the pastoral.⁶² Page three pictured an American flag with the words ‘our rights, and our liberties’; page four, a flag with a snake-like oil pipeline above the words ‘Don’t Tread on Us.’ Page seven featured a quotation in bold and all-caps from Sam Adams (1776): ‘Let us disappoint the men who are raising themselves upon the ruin of this country.’ Page ten quoted Henry Muhlenberg (1776): ‘The young people are right in fighting for their God-given native liberties.’ Page eleven depicted an eagle with an American flag and the words ‘Liberty Forever’ adorning the top of the signatures of twenty-four Catholic bishops, endorsed in a manner reminiscent of the Declaration of Independence.⁶³ The mood of the bicentennial celebration clearly influenced the mood of the pastoral.

The formation of ARC, the OPEC Oil Embargo, and the American Bicentennial formed a backdrop for understanding the poverty and powerlessness to which the bishops responded, upon the urging of Catholics within their dioceses. Awareness of these social contexts helped the bishops see the need to ameliorate the situation within their dioceses.

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⁶² At this point, I do not have information on who drew the artwork and who chose the quotations.
⁶³ Copy held at the West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center.
These theological, ecclesial and social contexts converged to influence the writing of *This Land Is Home to Me*. The pastoral singled out the “good” from the “evil” in the Catholic Appalachian experience of the 1970s. That which is holy promotes human life and its flourishing. That which is unjust causes powerlessness among the vast majority of the poor. The process of formulation and authorship reveals how *This Land Is Home to Me* addressed the situation of powerlessness affecting Appalachians – both Catholic and non-Catholic alike – and appropriated these international and national contexts into the unique Appalachian context.
CHAPTER 2

The Pastoral from Inception to Promulgation, May 1973-February 1975

Yet we still dare to speak,
and speak strongly,
first,
because we trust our people
and we know
that those who belong to The Lord
truly wish to do God’s will;
and second,
because we believe
that the cry of the poor
is also a message of hope,
a promise from Jesus,
that there can be a better way,
for Jesus has told us,
“The Truth will make you free.” (John 8:32)

This Land Is Home to Me, Part I

Although tainted by a closed-session meeting with industrial leaders, the process of formulating and authoring This Land Is Home to Me reveals especially the influences of Vatican II because of the collaborative model established among laity, religious and bishops and because of its unreserved choice for the well-being of Appalachia’s poor. As in the opening quotation, the Appalachian bishops practiced trust throughout the process as they listened to the cry of the poor. Brian O’Donnell, SJ summarized the essence of this process:

The story of the 1975 Letter is a story of committed Catholics joining in the lives and struggles of a dispossessed people; of them gathering the mountain folk to
learn what they desired for their land and their people; taking the cry for justice to
the Shepherds of the Catholic Church of the region to learn what modern analysis
and thousands of years of Judeo-Christian wisdom could say in response; and of
the writing of a Letter responding to the cries of the poor in an idiom all could
read.’’

The sense of trust and collaboration warranted by Vatican II enabled the preparation for
This Land Is Home to Me to unfold as it did, as well as the ecumenical sensitivities to
listen to the experiences of Catholic and non-Catholic Appalachians. Similarly, the
process of writing and revising demonstrated willingness by the bishops to hear and
incorporate the feedback of lay and religious, poor and wealthy. In content, theological
influences of liberation theology evidenced themselves. Special treatment for the
powerful industrial leaders late in the process threatened the authenticity of the
collaborative model being established by the Appalachian bishops. Ultimately, the
bishops’ commitment to the social mission of the Church and to “the Truth” outweighed
pressure from more powerful and wealthy parishioners, culminating in the promulgation
of the historic Appalachian pastoral, which has been honored and recognized as such.
This chapter traces the development of This Land Is Home to Me in chronological detail,
illuminating the pastoral’s appropriation of theological and ecclesial influences and
critique of the grave social contexts of poverty and powerlessness.

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64 Brian O’Donnell, SJ, “Recovering the Dream: The Birth and Reception of the Regional Pastoral
Letter This Land Is Home to Me by the Catholic Church in Appalachia” (ThM Thesis, Weston School of
Theology, 1986), 6-7.
PREPARATIONS FOR THE APPALACHIAN PASTORAL

The Idea Originates

Collaboration with the laity and ecumenical sensitivities evidenced themselves in the idea to write a pastoral letter critiquing the poverty and powerlessness of Appalachia. The idea for the Appalachian pastoral originated from eight members of the CCA who gathered for the CORA’s spring meeting held at Bethany College, West Virginia from May 2-4, 1973.65 After the meeting, the CCA members met at a local coffee shop and reflected on some of the pressing issues facing the people of Appalachia. They decided that a pastoral response from the regional bishops was necessary in the time of growing national awareness of the injustices in the region (because of ARC), and established a sub-committee within the CCA, approved by Charles M. Hughes, then-chairperson of the CCA and president of the Glenmary Home Missioners. The initial clarity of the vision that would culminate in the pastoral is striking. The minutes from that original meeting identified the sub-committee’s purpose: “to research a joint (26 Bishops) pastoral letter on powerlessness in Appalachia.”66 The sub-committee unswervingly dedicated themselves to this task; in less than two years, the CCA realized this vision in the promulgation of the Appalachian pastoral jointly endorsed by twenty-five bishops of Appalachia. At the meeting, the CCA appointed Les Schmidt, a Glenmary priest, as chairperson of the pastoral letter sub-committee, and established a strategy that included

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65 These members included Fr. Charles Hughes (chairperson, CCA and president, Glenmary Home Missioners), Fr. Les Schmidt (Glenmary priest), John Klug (Office of Social Action, Diocese of Wheeling), Steve Bossi (Dept. of Rural Development, USCC), Fr. Pat Jones, Fr. Jude Kloker, Fr. Vincent Rocco, and Phil Ronan.

66 Phil Ronan, “Minutes of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia Ad-Hoc Meeting,” 2-4 May 1973, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
“widespread informal meetings” and listed the Center of Concern as a primary resource for the task. Thus the process began.

**Dialogue**

The process of listening to the experiences of Appalachians revealed collaboration with the laity, ecumenical sensitivities and liberation theology’s methodology. The taskforce itself was comprised of women and men religious, laypersons, and a bishop. Throughout the process the taskforce served as a mediating agent between themselves and the bishops, the people of Appalachia (Catholic and non-Catholic alike), and various Catholic groups. This practice of dialogue represented the first stage of doing liberation theology – experiencing the situation of poverty plaguing Appalachians. Consequently, the taskforce first established spaces for dialogue enabling the people living in the region to communicate their ‘joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties’ to the taskforce and to bishops willing to listen to the needs of people.

In September 1973, CCA Executive Director John Barry sent a letter with a ‘Survey Instrument on Powerlessness’ to the bishops of the region. In his letter to Bishop Hodges (West Virginia), Barry identified the purpose of the survey as dialogue, stating that “if a significant number of Appalachian bishops deem it worthy, the dialogue could culminate in a pastoral letter” and affirming the necessity for collaboration with and support of the bishops: “Your thoughts, both on the subject of powerlessness in Appalachia, and on the feasibility of developing a pastoral on this subject, are most
needed at this time.” He concluded his letter with trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit. “From where I stand, serving the Appalachian people and the Catholic Church,” wrote Barry, “I see this as a movement of the Holy Spirit.” This trust Barry held throughout the process, as did others who work intimately in the pastoral.

The survey itself was a simple, one-page questionnaire with seven check-mark questions. It asked each bishop to identify the problems in his diocese; how the diocese responds to the needs of the poor; how the poor can communicate with the diocese; how parishes collaborate to relieve the needs of the poor; if a pastoral council exists; what services between dioceses might be helpful; and if the bishop would approve ‘a pastoral letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia’. Hodges checked ‘favorable’ to this last question, with the handwritten stipulation that the pastoral “must be credible in content.” Hodges stood firmly by this issue of credibility, even in the difficult months just before the pastoral’s promulgation; he wanted to be able to provide documentation to industry leaders should objections arise.

Meanwhile, the CCA elected Les Schmidt and Beth Davies, CND to conduct the ‘widespread informal meetings,’ also known as ‘Area Dialogues,’ with the people of Appalachia. Today we might call them ‘focus groups.’ Davies recalled that the two of them “literally spent every day of October 1973 on the road listening to justice-seeking

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68 Ibid.
69 Fr. John Barry to Appalachian Bishops and/or Representatives, “Survey Instrument of Powerlessness,” September 1973, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
folks in eleven of the thirteen Appalachian states.” Their trip began in Washington, D.C. at Network, where they met with people from various Catholic groups, some who reacted with hope and others with skepticism. “But we knew we had on our side a small number of people back in the mountains who saw life as the Gospel exposes it to us, and who were determined to be faithful to their vision of things. That was enough.” From there they traveled throughout Appalachia conducting ‘Area Dialogues’ with about thirty small groups of local people, both Catholic and non-Catholic alike, during the winter of 1973-74.

At the Annual Fall Meeting of the CCA (November 1973), Davies and Schmidt presented their findings. Their primary question was, “How can we, individually and corporately, work toward a more effective missionary presence of the Church in Appalachia?” The collated responses centered around a few points: the proclamation of the Gospel message; the call to identify with the poor; the clarification of ministerial roles within the ecclesial community; and an appreciation of Appalachian culture and the personal need for repentance. CCA members received the findings well and lent their support to the Pastoral Taskforce. They also elected Bishop Michael Begley of the Diocese of Charlotte (North Carolina) as chairperson of the CCA. According to Davies, his election was “without a doubt one more gift of the Spirit to the entire process” because of Begley’s reputation among his fellow bishops. And indeed, Begley went right to work. Soon after his election he sent a letter to the regional bishops “to inform

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70 Sr. Beth Davies, CND, “Reflections on the Writing of This Land Is Home to Me,” Speech delivered at the Annual Meeting of the CCA on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Appalachian Pastoral, 30 September 1995, 2. Personal files of Sr. Beth Davies, CND.
71 Ibid.
73 Davies, 2.
them of the steps that had been taken thus far regarding the pastoral and to ask for their support.”

In February 1974, the CCA identified the writing team. John Barry asked Bill Ryan, SJ of the Center of Concern to write the pastoral, giving him the final draft deadline of the November bishops meeting. Apparently, Ryan asked Joe Holland of the Center of Concern to be the primary author, while Ryan remained the Project Director. This choice of Holland and the Center of Concern signified the CCA’s, especially Les Schmidt’s, affinity for liberation theology and his interpretation of Appalachia’s situation in light of it. Holland listened to recordings of Area Dialogues, and agreed to write the pastoral, travelling for a week to listen to the Appalachian people prior to beginning his first draft. The CCA agreed to pay the Center of Concern $2000 plus all expenses for their services in writing the Appalachian pastoral and to allow the Center of Concern’s work to remain anonymous.

John Barry identified Holland’s responsibility: “to serve as Chairman of the research and writing team.” Davies viewed the choice of Holland to be “critical to the whole process.” His experience in Latin America had prepared him to do structural analysis of the problems of Appalachia. Joining the writing team were Joseph Sander, SJ, and Al Fritsch, SJ. Additionally, a consulting team was established,

74 Catholic Committee of Appalachia, “Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting,” Greensburg, PA, 4 May 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling WV.
75 Rev. John Barry to Father Ryan, Father Fritsch and Father Sanders, “Working relationship for writing team; proposed joint pastoral on Powerlessness in Appalachia,” 28 February 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV. The letter also named Joe Sanders, SJ of Wheeling College as chair of the writing team and Al Fritsch, SJ of the Center for Science and the Public Interest as the author of a follow-up Action Plan.
76 See “Methodology” in Ch. 1 for more information.
77 O’Donnell, 10.
78 Rev. John Barry to Bill Ryan, SJ, Letter, 14 February 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
79 Rev. John Barry to Joe Holland, Letter, 15 February 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
80 Davies, 3.
which included Sr. Elizabeth (Thomas Aquinas) Carroll RSM, Fr. Bernard Quinn (Glenmary Research), Mr. James Jennings (World Justice and Peace, USCC), and Rev. Bryan Hehir.  

Title

The first draft of the pastoral bore the title of the final draft: *This Land Is Home to Me: A Pastoral on Powerlessness in Appalachia by the Catholic Bishops of the Region*. The second half of the title, as we have seen, dated back to that first meeting at Bethany in May 1973. The first part originated at a Taskforce meeting at Port Vue, Pennsylvania, which gathered to determine the appropriate name for the document. The title of the document is attributed to Maureen Linneman.

In 1962, Linneman joined the Glenmary sisters in Appalachia, wearing the contemporary habit and being self-employed as a Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA). During the 1967 controversy with the hierarchy (namely, Archbishop Alter of Cincinnati), she, along with more than seventy sisters, left Glenmary to form a secular community called Federation of Communities in Service (FOCIS). During the time of the pastoral’s writing, Linneman served as the singer-songwriter for FOCIS, putting to music much of what members were experiencing. The pastoral takes its name from one of her songs of this time period, which she wrote “at an Appalachian networking workshop at the Highlander Center.” Born out of the experience of women in Tennessee, Linneman’s words sing: “This land is home to me, this land means more to

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81 Catholic Committee of Appalachia, “Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting.”
82 Davies, 5.
84 Ibid., 259.
me, than all the places and the races in the world around. This land of mountains and
valleys and streams, this land is home to me. But people come and go; they don’t seem
to show the signs of love for the simple things the mountains bring.”85 This song
captured the need for appreciation of Appalachian culture, land and people. For Davies,
it was quite appropriate that the title emerged from women’s experience, “It is not by
chance that the title was born of women – rooted in the community – in the lives of
unknown, unnamed women. For this is the place where the prophet stands calling God’s
people to a new vision of love and compassion.”86 The choice in title further evidenced
respect for the experiences of the poor and powerless, in this case, women in rural
Tennessee, many of whom probably were not Catholic.

COMPOSING THE APPALACHIAN PASTORAL

Composition of This Land Is Home to Me revealed collaboration among members
of the Church in the process of writing and review and the influence of liberation
theology in its contents. The CCA gave Joe Holland, a layperson, the primary task of
writing the pastoral. The twenty-six bishops, along with lay and religious members of
their dioceses, reviewed and critiqued the three primary drafts of the Appalachian
pastoral; the CCA solicited feedback from approximately one thousand readers of the
First Draft alone. The pastoral’s organization reflected liberation theology’s way of
doing theology,87 and the Scriptural references in Part II heavily relied on the theology of
the World Synod of Bishops’ document Justice in the World (1971). The writing

85 Davies, 5.
86 Ibid.
87 See Ch. 1 of this thesis paper for further discussion of this topic.
process evidenced the appropriation of these universal Church influences into the unique Appalachian context.

Preliminary Draft

Joe Holland presented the taskforce with a preliminary draft sometime in late winter 1974. Though well written and well cited, this draft did not meet the taskforce’s expectations, for it sounded too much like a church document. The taskforce desired that the pastoral reflect in its writing style the process of dialogue with the people so central and unique to the process of formulation; they wanted it to sound like it came from the people of Appalachia, not the hierarchy. Consequently, “Father Schmidt’s reaction to this first attempt was simply to discard it in the nearest waste basket and then recommend that it be rewritten.”

To aid in rewriting the document, Schmidt gave Holland *This Is Progress*, R.V. Bogan’s creative interpretation of Paul VI’s encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples, 1968). Holland appropriated Bogan’s free verse writing style, and the next draft read much differently.

First Draft

On behalf of the writing team and the CCA, Bishop Begley presented the First Draft of *This Land Is Home to Me* to the bishops at their April 1974 meeting, requesting their feedback by that June. Many bishops solicited responses from members of their dioceses. It is estimated that one thousand copies of the First Draft were circulated throughout Appalachia. The CCA taskforce collated critiques from various people throughout Appalachia. The bishops willingly collaborated in this step. As Begley

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88 Braccio; quoted in O’Donnell, 11. Joe Holland corroborated this story during his keynote address at the Catholic Committee of Appalachia’s Annual Meeting in September 2010.

89 O’Donnell, 12.
wrote, “I must say that our Brother Bishops have been most helpful and supportive.”

The Diocese of Wheeling (West Virginia) – the only state entirely within the Appalachian boundaries – served as an example of the review process.

Attesting to his concerns for dialogue and for ‘building bridges,’ Bishop Hodges and his staff collected responses from diverse people – including those who would approve of the Appalachian pastoral, and those who would not – including religious sisters, lawyers, representatives of coal companies, and the editor-in-chief of Orbis books. That people from these various perspectives took the time to respond attested to their respect for the work of the bishops. The responses varied, with people representing different segments expressing sometimes differing, and sometimes similar, concerns.

Opponents of the pastoral placed considerable pressure on Hodges, more than placed on any other bishop who would sign the pastoral. Brooks E. Smith, an attorney out of Kingwood, West Virginia, acknowledges this in his letter accompanying his comments on the First Draft: “As Bishop of Wheeling you are really “put on the spot” by this paper since “all of West Virginia” and only parts of 12 other States are included in “The Appalachian Region.” Thus, if the proposed pastoral letter is not true or just or charitable, you will probably receive the brunt of any criticism. Moreover, if the pastoral letter is faulty it is your Diocese which may be fragmented into bitter antagonistic groups.”

Bishop Hodges must have felt this pressure to proclaim the truth while not alienating any members of his diocese. Thus in his writings two themes repeatedly

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90 Bishop Michael J. Begley to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 15 July 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.

91 Brooks E. Smith to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 6 June 1974, 1, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. In this cover letter accompany his comments, Smith describes his thirty-year career as a lawyer: “Most of my professional life as a lawyer has been spent as an adversary to big government (both State and Federal) and to big unions. I understand powerlessness.”
emerge regarding the pastoral: dialogue that leads to reconciliation, and credibility of the message. Both concerns remained throughout the entirety of the revision process.

A thematic discussion of comments received by Hodges exposes concern for a truthful understanding of the ecclesial and social contexts described in Chapter 1. The following subsection reorganizes the sixteen points Hodges outlined in his letter to Begley according to those categories. Comments about the writing style, Church of the poor, Mother Jones, and the lack of Scripture evidenced ecclesial concerns; concern for oversimplification, communist influences and the lack of practical solutions showed social concerns. Ultimately, the CCA and the writing team charitably received the feedback they solicited.

Ecclesial Comments

The poetic, free verse writing style of This Land Is Home to Me reflected the voices of the people of Appalachia, as opposed to the official-sounding language of most Church-issued documents. Consequently, the choice in writing style further expressed an understanding of the Church as the ‘People of God’ and the role of the laity. Overall, the reviewers of the First Draft received favorably Schmidt’s insight into the style of the pastoral and Holland’s appropriation of Bogan’s work. According to Hodges, comments on the writing style constituted “the most positive response regarding the pastoral” from members of his diocese.92 A paragraph from the end of Part I in the First Draft illustrates the style:

   Hopefully,
   the church might once again
   be known as

– centers of the human spirit,
– places where poetry dares to speak,
– where the song reigns unchallenged,
– where art lives,
– where nature speaks,
– where little people and little needs are first,
– in a wilderness of destruction
  a great voice cries out
  for life. 93

In the Final Draft this passage remained intact, with some modifications, and is moved to the Conclusion, formulating the final words of the pastoral. 94 Of such free verse style, Anne Regina O’Leary, SSJ, President of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Wheeling, wrote, “The language of the letter and the personalism expressed are distinct qualities that make the letter highly effective.” 95 In an insight that would prove true, Sr. Mary Helen O’Brien, directress of Mount de Chantal Visitation Academy in Wheeling, hypothesized that “it will be more widely read” than typical Church documents because of the Appalachian pastoral’s poetic style. 96

Others, however, expressed reservation or dislike of the First Draft’s style. Brooks E. Smith, an attorney based in Kingwood, West Virginia, curtailed his praise of the style with a caution. He wrote, “The style is very effective and a welcome change from the dry, legalistic style of – say – a Vatican II document. However, using the exaggerations and imprecision of poetic license can and does cause confusion and real violence to the truth. Therefore, it takes real skill, genius and inspiration to use this

93 Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, “First Draft of This Land is Home to Me,” copy commented on by Philip J. Scharper, April 1974, 18, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
94 Theologically speaking, the modifications are significant. The ‘human spirit’ becomes ‘the (Holy) Spirit’; ‘a great voice’ becomes ‘the great voice of God.’
95 O’Leary, SSJ, “Comments on ‘This Land Is Home to Me.’”
96 Mary Helen O’Brien, SMJ to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 28 June 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
literary style properly.”97 Not all were so diplomatic in their critique of the style. Donald Donell, for instance, wrote that the First Draft would be “better suited for a musical ballad or folk song rather than a pronouncement by the Catholic bishops of the Region.”98 Similarly, Steven D. Narick, a lawyer/judge based out of Moundsville, West Virginia, wrote that the style “does not sound at all like Bishop’s [sic] addressing themselves to the Appalachia problems.”99 Those expressing such criticism misunderstood that the authors intended to reflect the process of dialogue and the bishops’ posture of listening to the ‘joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties’ of the people in Appalachia.

The understanding of the Church’s social mission and the call to act with justice revealed itself in the First Draft’s portrayal of the Church as poor and the servant of all and its reference to Mary Harris “Mother” Jones as a Catholic advocate of justice. Some reviewers, however, critiqued the pastoral’s description of these as too idealistic or even inaccurate. Gretchen Shaffer, SSJ, Executive Director of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Wheeling, found the Church’s claim to identify with the poor as an unbalanced representation because historically the Church often sided with the powerful.

She wrote, “Touting ourselves for giving rise to “many heroes of justice” should, perhaps, be balanced by the admission that from our ranks have also come oppressors of the poor.”100 Philip J. Scharper, Editor-in-Chief of Orbis Books, also questioned this portrayal of the Church as poor and humble. Next to the lines in Part II that identify the

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97 Smith to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 1.
98 Donald Donell to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, “Pastoral Letter,” 21 May 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. At this point in my research, I am unable to identify who Donell was.
99 Steven D. Narick to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 25 May 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. A memo titled “‘This Land Is Home to Me’ – First Draft,” which lists recipients of the draft for comment, identifies Narick as on the Pastoral Council, perhaps for one of the Wheeling Catholic Churches. West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center.
100 Gretchen Shaffer, SSJ to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, “Memorandum: Pastoral letter on powerlessness in Appalachia,” 31 May 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
Church as ‘poor and weak like Mary’ and as ‘the servant of all races, of all nations, of all peoples, of all cultures, of all regions,’ Scharper asked the question, ‘Fact or ideal?’

Others questioned the Church’s social mission, ipso facto, suggesting that the Church should be concerned with spiritual matters rather than issues of social justice. In his concluding paragraph, Tim A. Salvati of Beckley, West Virginia wrote, “Why can’t we direct our goals to the old-fashioned type of beliefs and bring our people to God without finding something to criticize?”

Subsequent drafts nuanced the image of the Church as poor, while asserting the Church’s social mission.

Continuing the theme of justice, the First Draft heralded Mother Jones as a Catholic advocate for the poor. The text read,

From the ranks of our people
have come
many heroes of justice…
In the mountain country, for instance,
we are proud
that from the Catholic family
there rose up a great fighter for justice
Mother Jones.

Cloaking Mother Jones with Catholicism did not sit well with some. As Sr. Gretchen Shaffer wrote, “Laying claim, by the way, to Mother Jones as a Catholic fighter for justice is a pretty thin claim.” Brooks Smith explained further why this is a ‘thin claim’. Citing five sources about the labor organizer, he wrote, “Mother Jones’ life is not in Butler’s ‘Lives of the Saints’ but her life is recounted in several accessable [sic] books.

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101 Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, “First Draft of This Land is Home to Me,” 19-20.
102 Tim A. Salvati to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 1 June 1974, 4, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. Salvati is probably in the coal industry, given his location in southern WV and his comments defending coal. His critical remarks correspond to particular parts of the pastoral; however, his copy of the pastoral has not been kept on file.
103 Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, “First Draft of This Land is Home to Me,” 2.
104 Shaffer, SSJ to Bishop Hodges, “Memorandum: Pastoral letter."
She may have ‘rose up’ from the ‘Catholic family,’ and she may have been beloved by unions and Socialists all over the country, but her life, her methods and her approach is not what our Catholic bishops should hold up as the ideal for solving today’s problems.\textsuperscript{105} He added that the ‘maiden Mary’ should be upheld as the “‘Mirror of (Industrial) Justice’ and the ‘Queen of (Industrial) Peace.’”\textsuperscript{106} The pastoral’s authors heard this criticism, and subsequent drafts omitted reference to her.

Ecumenical sensitivities warranted the writing of a pastoral strongly rooted in the Bible, the primary source of religious authority for many Protestants; furthermore, the importance of Scripture in the lives of Catholics also emerged with the Second Vatican Council. Nevertheless, many reviewers criticized the First Draft of \textit{This Land Is Home to Me} for the lack of scriptural references, especially in Part II “The Word of the Lord.” Shaffer offered a response that reflected the general sentiment. She wrote, “Part II would be stronger and more meaningful if it incorporated more of scripture to support the thesis rather than quoting the bishops exclusively. I suggest the absence of the Lord’s Word in Part II considerably weakens it.”\textsuperscript{107} The explicit quotation of only Psalm 23:1 in Part II legitimates her concern. In contrast to the opening of Part II quoted in an above section (“The Living God / the Lord whom we worship / is the God of the Poor”), the First Draft’s Part II began with the following ambiguous passage:

\begin{quote}
Everything that exists
is a message of the Lord.
Each message is special,
not the same as any other.
Every flower and bird
is a message of the Lord.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{105} Smith to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 13.
\textsuperscript{106} Smith to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 14.
\textsuperscript{107} Shaffer, SSJ to Bishop Hodges, “Memorandum: Pastoral letter.”
Every woman and child and man
is a message of the Lord…
Appalachia is a message of the Lord. ¹⁰⁸

This passage, though poetic and truthful, lacked the strong scriptural basis important
among Catholics post-Vatican II, and especially important in the mostly Protestant region
that is Appalachia. Reviewers of the First Draft combined these ecclesial-based concerns
with those related to the social contexts.

Social Context Comments

Part I of This Land Is Home to Me provided commentary on the socio-economic
conditions characterizing Appalachia and why such conditions existed. Primarily, the
bishops viewed injustices within the major industries, especially coal, as a significant
cause of widespread poverty and powerlessness; the OPEC Oil Embargo only heightened
their concerns. The First Draft highly criticized industry and the ‘forces’ that espoused
false economic principles. The following passage from Part II demonstrated the strong
condemnation of the ‘forces’:

They try to hide from the poor,
– by pushing them out of sight,
– by putting them in jail,
– by urging them not to have children,
– by killing their children before they are born,
– by teaching the children who are born
  that they are failures,
– by stealing their land,
– by demolishing their apartment buildings. ¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, “First Draft of This Land is Home to Me,” 19.
¹⁰⁹ Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, “First Draft of This Land is Home to Me.” As a note, this draft is
written just one year after Roe vs. Wade; the comments on children should be understood in light of the
legalization of abortion.
Some reviewers of the First Draft considered the bishops’ commentary and interpretation to be too simplistic in the pastoral’s stark contrast between the good ‘mountain folk’ and the bad ‘corporate giants’ and the overemphasis on the role of coal.

Fr. R. C. Nash, for instance, questioned ‘the oversimplification and possible errors’ in the pastoral, such as its treatment of coal. He wrote, “While coal is certainly central to much that has happened to Appalachia, I wonder if the letter is not putting too much of a burden on coal,” identifying timber, oil and natural gas as other culprits. Bishop Hodges acknowledged this in the beginning of the Appalachian pastoral’s process. On the initial questionnaire sent to the bishops, Hodges check-marked ‘one-industry control, eg, steel, coal, textiles’ as a ‘pressing problem’ in his diocese, with the handwritten, qualifying comment ‘to some extent.”

Some representatives of industry who reviewed the First Draft took greater offense at the oversimplified tone and felt the need to defend their industries. More baldly, Donell asserted that the First Draft was “filled with half-truths and sweeping statements indicative of a profound lack of knowledge of the subject matters sought to be covered.” Similarly, Smith wrote, “If ever overstatement, half-truth and misstatement were woven together to do violence to the truth, this is it.” In his comments, he defended the ‘corporate giants,’ claiming that they “do much good – provide jobs, produce needed fuel, pay their taxes and make charitable contributions.” He challenged specifically the assumption that corporations lack concern for the workers,

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110 Fr. R. C. Nash to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, “Pastoral Letter on Appalachia,” 24 May 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. Fr. Nash served as a chancellor within the Diocese of Wheeling, according to the author’s interview with John Klug.
111 Barry to Appalachian Bishops and/or Representatives.
112 Donell to Bishop Hodges, “Pastoral Letter.”
113 Smith to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 3.
114 Ibid., 4.
such as that which is described in the above quotation from the First Draft. Using a personal example to illustrate, Smith wrote: “In 1929 eight years before social security, my widowed Mother, Sarah Boggess Smith of Fairmont, West Virginia, as an agent for Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, sold to the Consolidation Coal Company the first group life insurance policy to cover coal miners in the United States. Before this time, coal miners were considered to have too hazardous an occupation to be covered for life insurance. Shame on any person or group that tries to paint corporate employers as heartless exploiters of their employees.”¹¹⁵ Others felt compelled to defend industry. Salvati defended coal, particularly the practice of strip mining and the reclamation that is supposed to return the land to a ‘usable’ contour. He wrote, “We have laws now – have they forgotten? Reclamation is being accomplished,”¹¹⁶ further commenting that it “sounds like the president of the UMWA (United Mine Workers of America) wrote this.”¹¹⁷

While both men recast the depiction of industry, neither man naïvely denied that industry commits injustices at times. Later Salvati admitted to the bishop: “You and I know there is some destruction in strip mining. Inadvertently, some people are hurt. Our laws today are stopping this.”¹¹⁸ Smith, too, acknowledged industry’s irresponsibility at times, particularly with reclamation efforts. He also conceded that non-West Virginians earned great fortunes from the state’s natural resources (particularly coal), while such people lacked ‘the personal pride and pressure’ to reinvest the money in the state.

“American people benefitted,” he quipped, “West Virginians did not to the extent they

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 9.
¹¹⁶ Salvati to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 2.
¹¹⁷ Ibid., 3.
¹¹⁸ Ibid., 4.
Such comments balanced their critique of the oversimplified depictions of ‘corporate giants’ in the First Draft.

While some on the industry side critiqued the First Draft’s treatment of coal, this is not unanimous. Melvin Triolo, Secretary-Treasurer of Logan Coal Operators’ Association, was one exception to the above criticism. He wrote, “The draft was very interesting and to the point. In most instances the draft is so well written any practical person who is familiar with the Appalachia region cannot offer any adverse criticism. The letter is written in a very skillful and diplomatic manner and points out the situation existing in some of these areas.” Why he responded so charitably as a representative of coal is uncertain. Based on this letter, Triolo seemed to have some sort of personal relationship with the bishop; he mentioned a fortieth anniversary of ordination celebration of a priest they knew in common and wished the bishop well while recuperating from a ‘heart condition.’ It could also be the mention of a certain R.E. Salvati. One of the more critical reactions to the First Draft came from Tim A. Salvati (quoted above and below), perhaps related to R.E. Salvati. It could be that Triolo tried to distance himself from such harsh criticism by denying that the First Draft warranted ‘any adverse criticism.’

The bishops and writing team omitted from the Final Draft the passage quoted in this sub-section’s opening paragraph. Nevertheless, the Final Draft of This Land Is Home to Me remained critical of corporations. Subsequent drafts, however, nuanced the ‘sweeping statements’ to solidify the credibility of their content.

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119 Smith to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 10.
120 Melvin Triolo to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 3 June 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
In addition to the oversimplification comments, the First Draft’s critique of the liberal economic system elicited the response that the document leaned towards socialism, big government regulation and even anti-Americanism. The following passage exemplified what some found fault in:

The forces which nourish these false principles and these false values try to teach the people:

- that they must fight one another to get ahead;
- that success means beating others out;
- that speed and efficiency are more important than care and concern;
- that if we keep busy enough, there will be no need for silence for peace for prayer…

Some felt it necessary to defended liberal economics and the process of production and consumption. Smith writes, “True, America is fat. We consume too much. We work too hard. We play too hard. However, we give a lot. Our consumption creates jobs. Our profits permit expansion of jobs…People work hard for this type of income (profits from dividends) – and the income is used for good purposes, including,” – Smith reminds the bishop – “moneys to run the Diocese of Wheeling.” His criticism points out that even the Church benefited from the economic system that the Church criticized as creating so much poverty and suffering.

Salvati particularly exhibited a harsh and sarcastic response to the pastoral’s authors. Perceiving the pastoral to be opposed to progress, he questioned, “Are we

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121 Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, “First Draft of This Land is Home to Me,” 22.
122 Smith to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 5.
saying that all industry is plunder? Shall we all go back to farming; that is, without tractors? Why not industrial development?”

Comments eighteen and nineteen questioned the patriotism of the authors: “I imagine there is no part of the United States which can satisfy this writer…Sounds anti-American to me.” And in the biting sarcasm that pervaded the entire letter, Salvati wrote, “Let’s turn to communism, where everyone shares! I’m sure the Church would back that.”

His emotion-laden observations snowball to one of his final accusations: “They’re putting words in your mouth, Bishop. Hopefully, self-thinking leaders of the Church will tell them what to do, not be told!”

Presumably, the bishops and the writing team sorted through Salvati’s emotions to see any legitimate concerns he might have voiced.

While addressing the injustices present in the social order, the First Draft of *This Land Is Home to Me* failed to provide concrete solutions to ameliorate the situation of the poor. The Appalachian bishops offered guidance, but not answers. The opening of the First Draft’s Part III “Facing the Future” explained:

In what follows,
we hope to give some guidance
to our Catholic people of the Appalachian Region…

Since we have no easy answers,
this letter is only a first step.
But it must not be the last step.
Hopefully, this letter,
itself a product of dialogue with our people,
will start a process,
where in the Catholic community
and all people of good will
can join together

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123 Salvati to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 1.
124 Ibid., 2.
125 Ibid., 3.
126 Ibid.
throughout the region
to work for a more just society.127

Rather than practical solutions outlined within the pastoral, the bishops recommended that the CCA create an “Action Plan” that addressed concrete ways to eradicate injustice and powerlessness throughout Appalachia. Some, such as Sr. O’Brien, perceived Part III’s reference to an action plan as a hopeful sign. She “was pleased to note in Part III some specific suggestions for a plan of action. This carries the message from the realm of the informative and inspirational to the practical.”128 Similarly, Sr. O’Leary wrote that “the reader is encouraged by the reference to a Plan of Action that will follow [the pastoral’s promulgation], to recommendations that will be considered, and an invitation to share in dialogue,”129 interpreting the lack of a ‘final tone’ to be an advantage of the Appalachian pastoral.

Not all perceived the absence of practical solutions in a positive light. Some, such as Donell, accused the bishops of merely pointing to the problems. He wrote, “(The First Draft) praises social security but offers no improvement; it praises labor unions, to which I say look around; it blames industry for setting man upon man without one suggestion for improvement…The problems we know, give us the solutions please.”130 The Appalachian bishops, however, concerned themselves with interpreting the situation of poverty in light of Scripture and Tradition and offered principles to help create a more just society for Appalachians. This tone of guidance rather than concrete answers remained in the Final Draft.

127 Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, “First Draft of This Land is Home to Me,” 25.
128 O’Brien, SMJ to Bishop Hodges, Letter.
129 O’Leary, SSJ, “Comments on This Land Is Home to Me.”
130 Donell to Bishop Hodges, “Pastoral Letter.”
The comments solicited by Bishop Hodges regarding the First Draft of *This Land Is Home to Me* fell into two general categories – those concerned with ecclesial issues and those concerned with interpretation of the social context. As is evident, the responses to the First Draft varied. Some offered a harsh rebuttal, while some comments gave courage to continue the writing process. As Scharper wrote, “I would sincerely hope for the impact on the American church beyond Appalachia, that the document will be issued without major modifications.”131 The pastoral’s authors incorporated many suggestions into subsequent drafts; their bold decry of injustices remained, however, because the Church’s mission commended them to do so.

**Second and Third Drafts**

Regarding the revised version, Barry wrote, “The second draft represents comments and responses from several of you, our Appalachian bishops. It also represents the thoughtful reaction of many in the field.”132 Specifically, Bishop Begley wrote, “This draft…exemplifies a strong scriptural basis that was almost universally desired.”133

Jesuit William R. Ryan, Program Director at the Center of Concern, included detailed explanations of the revisions made to the First Draft of *This Land Is Home to Me*. Regarding the scriptural base, Ryan commented: “an attempt has been made to make the whole pastoral reflect a more biblical orientation.”134

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131 Scharper to Klug, Letter.
133 Bishop Michael J. Begley to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 19 September 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
Jesuit Juan Alfaro’s work served as the primary source for rewriting the scriptural interpretation in Part II “The Word of the Lord.” Holland borrowed significantly from this work in revising the first three sections of Part II. “The God of the Poor” highlighted God’s salvific work in the Old Testament, quoting Exodus 3 and 14 and Ezekiel 34. This corresponded directly to Alfaro’s section on “Yahweh, God Liberator of the Oppressed.” The next section, “The Messiah and His Kingdom,” continued tracing God’s salvific work in the person of Jesus Christ, quoting Psalm 72, Luke 4 and 6, Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 30. Holland relied on Alfaro’s discussions of “The Announcement of the ‘Kingdom of God’: The Messiah Will Do Justice to the Oppressed” and “Kingdom of God and Justice in the Message and Life of Jesus” in constructing this section. The third section, “The Church’s Mission,” described how the Church continues Christ’s mission, quoting Acts 4, James 2, and John 3. This section corresponded closely to Alfaro’s “Christian Love and Justice in the Theology of the New Testament,” which included sub-sections on ‘Origins of Christianity,’ ‘The Letter of St. James,’ and ‘The Theology of St. John.’ Alfaro’s work significantly strengthened the Appalachian pastoral’s presentation of Sacred Scripture.

Ryan also responded to other critiques of the First Draft, including oversimplified tone, the narrow focus on coal, and systemic criticism within the pastoral. Regarding oversimplification, Ryan acknowledged that “there was some truth to this;” however, “we felt that it is necessary to retain something of the starkness of contrast, both for poetic and

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136 Ibid., 20-31.
137 Ibid., 31-33, 36-38.
biblical reasons. Complexity must never be allowed to cover over the possibility of profoundly opposite human choices, e.g. sin/grace, life/death, justice/injustice, etc." He further nuanced his comments by claiming that well-intentioned people often get entangled in structural sin. Regarding coal, Ryan recognized that some expressed concern for the central focus afforded to coal. Nevertheless, the writing team did not include this in their revisions. Ryan explained, “After consulting with experts, we continue to believe that coal is the central economic reality of the region. We have supplemented it with other resources, but left coal central.” Additionally, some reviewers appeared to be cautious with the systemic analysis of injustice. Sympathetic to this, Ryan acknowledged that such analysis had not been a part of the U.S. Catholic experience, because, according to him, of Catholic’s minority stance in the country. He quoted, however, from the long list of Catholic social teaching beginning with *Rerum Novarum*, claiming that domestic and international injustices could only be alleviated by structural change. Regarding *This Land Is Home to Me*, Ryan wrote, “We hope that the pastoral of the bishops of Appalachia will constitute one more important step in this long and powerful tradition.”

The CCA sent the Second Draft to the Appalachian bishops in September 1974. Though not as widely disseminated as the First Draft, Catholics throughout Appalachia reviewed the Second Draft. For instance, Wheeling College (West Virginia) hosted a consultation on the Second Draft from September 13-15. Participants included representatives from ARC (Washington, D.C.), United Mine Workers (Washington,

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139 Ibid., 3.
140 Ibid., 4.
D.C.), West Virginia Coal Association (Charleston, West Virginia), the pastoral’s writing team (Al Fritsch, SJ), FOCIS, religious orders (including Sr. Gretchen Shaffer), and a member of the Catholic Worker in West Virginia. Other observers included some people who read the First Draft. The main concern raised at this meeting was the focus on coal to the neglect of other industries in the region that remained in the Second Draft.  

Similarly, during a preliminary consultation on the pastoral, some bishops of Appalachia expressed concern for the perceived focus on Central Appalachia (and coal) to the disregard of issues facing Northern and Southern Appalachia. Presumably, this was a concern of the bishops of those regions who felt wary about endorsing a pastoral not pertaining to their dioceses. The bishops present at the consultation decided, however, that “there is very good reason for the Bishops of the whole region to direct the Church’s attention to those problems and to indicate a unified regional support.” As an example, the bishops cited Bethlehem Steel, who “has offices in Pittsburgh, has steel operations in Buffalo, NY, and mines coal in Jenkins, KY.” John Barry collated the varied comments from the bishops and forwarded the comments to the Center of Concern.

The Third Draft responded to some of the concerns raised. The pastoral’s writing team explained that the desire to write an ‘Appalachian’ pastoral led them to focus primarily on the unique situation of Central Appalachia. They feared that discussion of all socio-economic injustices throughout the entire Appalachian region gave the pastoral

141 John Klug to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Memorandum, 1 October 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
142 “Preliminary Bishops Consultation on Proposed Appalachian Pastoral.” The meeting was convened at the Pittsburgh International Airport. Bishops present at the consultation included Begley (Charlotte), Leonard (Pittsburgh), Hodges (Wheeling), Durick (Nashville), Sullivan (Richmond), and Rev. R. J. Williamson for Bishop Head (Buffalo), along with CCA members.
143 Ibid.
too much of a national focus, to the neglect of saying anything specific about Appalachia. Accordingly, the writing team “tried to strike a balance by stressing the uniqueness of Central Appalachia, while linking it symbolically and systematically to the rest of the corridor in particular and to the rest of the nation in general.” 144 Ultimately, all Appalachian bishops, except for one, accepted This Land Is Home to Me’s focus on Central Appalachia.

Additionally, the pastoral’s treatment of unions emerged as a primary issue in the note sent to the Center of Concern. Both Leonard and Durick highlighted the positive role unions played in creating more just labor situations. However, the Third Draft raised some criticisms of unions, based on the critiques of Sullivan, Hodges and Fr. Williamson. Sullivan desired for the pastoral to “speak of all injustices, even that in labor unions;” Hodges cautioned that the pastoral seemed “too idealistic re Appalachian people,” noting that the description “turns off business.” 145 The Third Draft thus described ‘good willed owners and operators’ as well as ‘miners obligations.’

At this point the Center of Concern remained willing to further address questions and concerns raised by the bishops regarding the Third Draft. As Joe Holland wrote in his letter to Barry accompanying the Third Draft, “If there remains anything which you would like to change, add, or subtract, please don’t feel anyone will be offended at this end. After all it is their letter!” 146 Sentiments soon changed after a closed-session

144 Ibid., 2.
145 The Center Staff, “Revision on Third Draft of Appalachian Pastoral Letter,” 23 October 1974, 1, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
146 Joe Holland to Rev. John Barry, Letter, 24 October 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
meeting between bishops and industry leaders threatened the authenticity of the bishops’ apparent concern for the powerless.

**PRIVATE MEETING WITH INDUSTRIAL LEADERS**

The Appalachian bishops’ collaborative model and their concern for the poor and powerless came into question during a private meeting between some bishops and industry leaders. Some Catholics, who were owners of coal companies in West Virginia and in the Pittsburgh area, expressed grave concerns about the depiction of the coal companies in the document. Consequently, Begley explained, “a few Bishops of the region have requested an opportunity to invite representatives of management to give expression to the letter.”

In preparation for the meeting, Fr. Barry sent “background material that will be useful in their presentation.” This included a copy of the Second Draft of *This Land Is Home to Me*, a move that became a point of contention for the writing team who had worked diligently to produce the Third Draft prior to the bishops’ November meeting. On a snowy December 3, 1974, four of the regional bishops – Hodges (West Virginia), Leonard (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania), Ackerman (Covington, Kentucky), and Begley (Charlotte, North Carolina) – along with John Barry (CCA Executive Director) and Fr. Don Bauer, a labor priest from Syracuse, New York met with a few industrialists at the Pittsburgh airport. Representatives of the Charleston-based

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147 Bishop Michael J. Begley to Ordinaries of Appalachian Area, Memo, 15 November 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
148 Ibid.
149 The CCA did not send the Third Draft to the bishops until after this December meeting with industrialists, even though the Third Draft was available in late October. I am uncertain as to the delay and as to why the Second, and not the Third, Draft was used at this meeting.
150 Fr. Don Bauer’s previous work included the Farah Pants Company boycott in El Paso, TX in 1973.
West Virginia Coal Association, including President Edwin K. Wiles\textsuperscript{151} and Chairman of the Board Thomas J. Whyte, and members of the Consolidated Coal Company, located in Pittsburgh, attended this meeting. Begley had guaranteed that the meeting would “be only an opportunity for them to state their feelings.”\textsuperscript{152} Barry furthered assured the CCA Executive Committee that the meeting’s purpose was “to insure maximum dialogue and cooperation.”\textsuperscript{153} Nevertheless, some members involved in the pastoral expressed concern “that such a meeting could unduly influence the bishops,”\textsuperscript{154} and felt uncertain about the impact of the meeting on the Appalachian pastoral.

The meeting commenced at 11:30am with an opening prayer and state of the question by Bishop Begley. Then began what must have been a lively ‘hearing for industrialists,’ with the bishops presenting their perspective and listening to the concerns of the coal representatives. According to Hodges’ handwritten notes on the agenda, coal representatives expressed concerned about coal being ‘overemphasized’ and presented as ‘the villain’. Next to Wiles’ name, Hodges wrote, “What is the ultimate desired result of the document? Is it a basic attack on the free enterprise system?”\textsuperscript{155} Based on Hodges’ handwritten notes on Draft 2, the discussion focused primarily on the Introduction and Part I ‘The Cry of the Land and the People.’ This is the part, of course, which critiqued the present situation and placed much blame for the powerlessness of Appalachians on

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Wiles attended the consultation on the pastoral at Wheeling College in Sept. 1974. Klug commented that Wiles “did not offer any serious objections to the document as a whole but did question two or three sections of the draft as to their accuracy.” See the memorandum from John Klug to Bishop Hodges dated Oct. 1, 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
\item Bishop Begley to Ordinary of Appalachian Area, Memo.
\item Rev. John Barry to CCA Executive Committee, “Agenda for 4 November, ’74,” undated, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
\item Beth Davies, CND, “CCA: Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting,” 4 November 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
\item Catholic Committee of Appalachia, “Hearing and Planning Session – Proposed Pastoral Letter,” Pittsburgh International Airport, 3 December 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. Bishop Hodges’ personal copy.
\end{itemize}
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the power of King Coal. A brief example provided insight into part of their dialogue. Next to the pastoral’s statement that ‘coal is central’ to Appalachian economy, Hodges wrote a comment attributed to Wiles, who asserted that “coal wages in W.Va are above the national average.” Dialogue such as this occurred for nearly two hours. At 1:20 they broke for lunch.

Notably absent up until this point in the meeting were important individuals in the pastoral’s process. For reasons not really known, the nature of the meeting remained closed session, not open to the public or even to members of the CCA and writing team. Sr. Davies, who conducted the sounding sessions, summarized the sentiment: “Anxious CCA Task Force members awaited the outcome of the meeting which was not open to them. This only served to increase the anxiety. Would the letter remain intact?” The CCA and writing team had dedicated more than a year and a half of their lives to the process of writing This Land Is Home to Me; during the meeting with industrialists, the fate of the pastoral seemed to be out of their hands and into the hands of the powerful.

At 2:30pm the meeting reconvened with additional people: the pastoral’s author Joe Holland, CCA member Joe Callahan, CSC, and Bill McClinton. In his notes, Hodges wrote that corporations did not pay enough taxes, perhaps a critique raised by these people, and wrote the ‘pursuit of dialogue,’ a reminder of the purpose of the meeting. At 3:42 more CCA members involved in the process are permitted entry: Pat Jones on the action section and how it would be implemented; Al Fritsch, SJ on theology;

156 Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Notes on Second Draft of This Land Is Home to Me, 3 December 1974, 5, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
157 Davies, 4.
158 At this point in my research, I am unable to identify ‘Catholic President’ McClinton and his role in the pastoral.
Les Schmidt on the process; and Beth Davies on collating the resolutions. A short thirteen minutes later, the meeting adjourned.

The people waiting outside the meeting room were not the only ones frustrated by the meeting’s closed nature. The Center of Concern’s Acting Director Peter Henriot, SJ sent a three-page letter to Begley dated one week after the meeting, with copies to the other bishops present at the meeting. In no uncertain terms, Henriot expressed his concern over the process and the Pittsburgh meeting. He critiqued the exclusion of the writing team from the meeting and the bishops’ use of an outdated draft of the pastoral. Primarily, however, Henriot criticized the special treatment afforded to the industrialists by the bishops. His comments captured the dissatisfaction and are worth quoting at length:

Most disturbing to us, however, is what appears to be special treatment accorded to the representatives of industry at the Pittsburgh hearing. When the ordinary people of the region were asked to speak as part of the early input for preparing the Pastoral, it was mainly Father Barry and Father Schmidt, together with the writing team when possible, who went to listen. When the writing team sought guidance, they spoke always with Barry and Schmidt. Yet when a few members of the industrial community wish to voice their opinions, it is the bishops themselves who come to listen – and in closed session, while the ordinary people must speak at open, public meetings. We must ask whether this does not seem to imply that there are two standards operating: one for the powerful and one for the powerless – even in the very process of drafting a Pastoral on powerlessness.159

Henriot’s words were poignant and prophetic. He concluded, however, with a ‘vote of confidence,’ particularly in the witness of Bishop Hodges, “who perhaps will pay the greatest price for his forthrightness,” since his state is situated entirely within Appalachia and is so dependent on coal. He concluded with a prayer: “We rejoice that the Spirit of the Lord is bringing something powerful to birth in the Church of Appalachia…we pray

159 Henriot, SJ to Bishop Begley, Letter, 2.
for you as this task continues, that you may stand strong as you have already stood, and that your strength may be a sign of love for all your people.”

Furthermore, Henriot asserted that the Center of Concern had fulfilled its obligations to the CCA, who possessed the original copy of the third and final draft. He strongly requested that the CCA fulfill its financial obligations to the Center of Concern; the CCA still owed half of the $2000 initially agreed upon, plus Holland’s expenses for the Pittsburgh meeting ($63.73).

In his response to Henriot, Hodges defended Begley’s decision. He wrote, “Bishop Begley was put in a position not of his own making, which came as a surprise to him… I think he made a horse-back decision to make the best use of the presence of the writing team.” In this statement, Hodges revealed the painstaking efforts of dialogue and collaboration in the work for justice. In a letter to Begley a few months earlier, Hodges cautioned that the bishops “remain mindful that our role is to build bridges between the oppressed and the oppressor, between the individual and the institution, between man [sic] and his Creator.” These are the thoughts of a man trying to bring together diverse people and perspectives for the betterment of the poor and of all.

The private meeting with industrialists threatened the authenticity of the bishops’ concern for the Church’ social mission and for collaboration with the poor and powerless. Uncertainty regarding This Land Is Home to Me’s progress characterized the time immediately following the Pittsburgh meeting. Still, the CCA and writing team remained

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160 Ibid.
161 Peter J. Henriot, SJ to Rev. Joseph Callahan, CSC, Letter, 10 December 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
162 Bishop Joseph H. Hodges to Peter J. Henriot SJ, Letter, 14 December 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
163 Hodges to Bishop Begley, Letter, 2.
committed to the success of the pastoral. On December 4, the day after the Pittsburgh meeting, John Barry mailed the Third Draft to Bishops Begley, Hodges, Ackerman and Leonard. Ten days later, Hodges responded with his critiques of the Third Draft. Ultimately, the Appalachian bishops, led by Hodges, continued to dedicate themselves to decrying injustices throughout the region.

**FINAL REVISIONS**

Bishops Hodges’ feedback on the Third Draft threatened to thwart the completion of the pastoral, if the writing team failed to incorporate his thoughts. Hodges expressed his concerns charitably, of course. In his opening paragraph, Hodges described the complexity involved “in balancing truth, justice and good will so as to bring about change by a united effort of all persons and groups involved in our present situation.”

While some of his suggestions corrected grammatical errors, the most significant comment – Item #1 – dealt with the ‘credibility of content.’ Namely, Hodges opposed the following paragraph in Part I of the Third Draft:

Some of its forces
have torn down the green trees,
ripped up the brown earth,
sometimes stolen the land,
made the people sell their labor,
and brought tears, hunger, and even death
to women, children, and men.
Then, believing their spirit broken,
these forces turned in scorn to call the mountain people
“white trash.”

Especially perplexed by the second half of this paragraph, Hodges wrote, “Of whom do these lines speak? I would require some documentation, explanation, sources or concrete

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164 Hodges to Peter J. Henriot, SJ, Letter.
examples before I would be willing to sign support of these lines.” Bishop Sullivan understood the seriousness of Hodges’ statement and the potential implications on the Appalachian pastoral’s success. Trying to reassure Hodges, Sullivan wrote, “I would hope that you might suggestion a simpler wording of Item #1 in your letter. I would hate for you not to sign the pastoral because of four lines which just as easily could be left out of the final draft.” Holland weighed seriously Bishop Hodges’ comments on the Third Draft, namely “items #2, 4, 5, and the second part of #11,“ which mostly corrected grammatical errors. He passed responsibility for adjusting Hodges’ other recommendations onto the CCA. Most significantly, Holland failed to edit the paragraph with the phrase ‘white trash.’

John Barry sent the Final Draft of This Land Is Home to Me to the Appalachian bishops on December 23 and requested their final review, approval and permission to use their signatures. Hodges received the Final Draft favorably, promising “to give it wide coverage, finance it, defend it and implement it.” However, he refused to endorse the pastoral in its current form because the paragraph he opposed remained unaltered in the Final Draft. He forcefully explained,

Before my name can be used on the Pastoral I wish an identification of those who are spoken of as “these forces” in paragraph 3 on page 3. Very serious charges are made in this paragraph. It is not a problem about destruction of the land or use of the term “white trash.” The problem is who are “these forces” accused of calling the mountain people “white trash”? I need a concrete example or

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165 Bishop Joseph H. Hodges to Bishop Michael J. Begley, Letter, 14 December 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
166 Bishop Walter Sullivan to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 17 December 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
documentation so I can defend this. I shall be happy to sign as soon as I receive this.

At this point, Bishop Hodges, living in the only state entirely within Appalachia, refused to support the Appalachian pastoral.

Throughout the process, the CCA team put forth great energy securing the support of the Appalachian bishops for the pastoral, especially the support from influential bishops like Hodges. Early on, some bishops offered great support with little or no reservations, such as Mussio (Steubenville, Ohio), Daley (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), Hogan (Altoona-Johnstown, Pennsylvania), Head (Buffalo, New York), and Durick (Nashville, Tennessee). Other bishops desired no involvement with the Appalachian pastoral, such as McDonough (Louisville, Kentucky), McCormick (Scranton, Pennsylvania), and McShea (Allentown, Pennsylvania). Bishop Hodges stood in the middle, “cautiously supportive and serious about his suggested changes.”\textsuperscript{169} Much rested on Hodges’ decision, for the other bishops looked to him as a moral authority on the issue throughout the process and would follow suit. In September 1974, Begley encouraged Hodges in a letter accompanying the Second Draft: “Please excuse me for again stressing that the need to receive your personal endorsement of the pastoral is of the highest priority.”\textsuperscript{170} He signed the letter, “hoping we can continue to rely upon your cooperation.”\textsuperscript{171} Now with the Final Draft of \textit{This Land Is Home to Me} ready, at least one bishop – Connare (Greensburg, Pennsylvania) – refused to sign without Hodges’ approval of the Final Draft. Connare wrote, “I would not authorize at this time the use of

\textsuperscript{169} Joe Callahan to Rev. John Barry and Les Schmidt, “Report on visit to bishops (to date),” 22 October 1974, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.
\textsuperscript{170} Begley to Bishop Hodges, Letter, 19 September 1974.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
my signature, until I had the assurance that any questions raised by Bishop Hodges and Bishop Ackerman are completely resolved to their satisfaction.” Bishop Begley further illuminated the weight of Hodges’ decision. According to Begley, with Hodges’ “approval acquired by telephone, a total of 25 Bishops of the region would sign the instrument.” The CCA’s efforts to secure the support of the Appalachian bishops rested on the decision of one bishop.

Given Hodges’ influence, the CCA executive committee, now responsible for any further revisions to the Final Draft, gave “serious attention” to the paragraph in question. Ultimately, “After attempts to rewrite the cited paragraph, the committee voted to remove it in its entirety.” With Hodges’ support secured, the CCA gained the backing of twenty-five bishops throughout Appalachia for This Land Is Home to Me. All eligible bishops endorsed the pastoral, except for McShea of Allentown, whose diocese barely fell within the Appalachian region.

**PROMULGATION, IMMEDIATE RECEPTION, AND RECOGNITION**

The process of formulating the Appalachian pastoral – collaborative, justice-oriented, ecumenical – culminated in the promulgation of This Land Is Home to Me: A Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia by the Catholic Bishops of the Region on February 1, 1975, two weeks before Ash Wednesday, on the campus of Wheeling

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172 Bishop William Connare to Bishop Michael J. Begley, Letter, 2 January 1975, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV. I do not know the nature of Ackerman’s concerns.
173 John Klug to Bishop Hodges, “Catholic Committee on Appalachia Executive Committee Meeting, January 13-14, 1975,” 17 January 1975, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
174 Ibid.
College.\textsuperscript{175} Regarding the process, John Barry testified “to the good will and thoughtful articulations of many – the simple folks of inner-city Pittsburgh, rural Pennsylvania and northern Alabama, as well as people in the “hollers” and coal camps of Central Appalachia,” further describing the bishops as “most cooperative and kind, indicating your suggestions and support.”\textsuperscript{176} Those gathered for the CCA’s spring meeting, convened by Bishop Hodges, attested to the enthusiasm present at that historic moment. Sr. Davies recalled the sentiment at that meeting: “As we gathered in that hall, looked around the room and saw the many faces of those whose lives were threaded with ours, the strands of the Spirit – we suddenly realized that all along the Spirit was weaving with invisible threads drawing us to this day.”\textsuperscript{177}

Before the CCA could disseminate the Appalachian pastoral, they had to meet one more request by Bishop Hodges. The original Final Draft depicted artwork throughout the document. One cartoon particularly concerned Hodges: a drawing of a gasoline hose as a snake with the words “Don’t Tread on Us” and the names of various oil and coal companies. Perceiving it as a direct attack on the energy companies, Hodges requested that the CCA Task Force members black out the names on the drawing with a marker. Obviously, they obliged, not wanting to stall the promulgation.

In the weeks following the promulgation, \textit{This Land Is Home to Me} was published and/or covered in more than forty diocesan newspapers throughout the region,\textsuperscript{178} and distributed in newspaper format in the spirit of the Catholic Worker. A few weeks after

\textsuperscript{175} In his promulgation of it, Bishop Begley addressed the document “To the Catholic People and to All People of Good Will throughout the Appalachian Region,” echoing \textit{Gaudium et Spes}.

\textsuperscript{176} Rev. John Barry to Ordinaries of Appalachian Dioceses, “Final Draft of Pastoral,” 23 December 1974, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.

\textsuperscript{177} Davies, 4.

\textsuperscript{178} “Special Thanks to Bishops of Appalachia.”
the promulgation, Hodges wrote, “Thus far the Appalachian Pastoral seems to have gone over well. I think it has aroused a lot of interest and will continue to do so.”  

Comments from other Christian churches serve as an example.

Leaders of other Christian churches in Appalachia provided some of the greatest affirmations for the pastoral. Wilburn C. Campbell, an Episcopal bishop in the region, called the pastoral “brilliant and deeply moving.”  

Official responses also came from Mount Pleasant United Presbyterian Church (Ohio), the Episcopal Church of the Diocese of West Virginia, and a bishop of the United Methodist Church in the West Virginia area. Additionally, CORA unanimously endorsed the pastoral after its publication. Such responses demonstrated the ecumenical sensitivities present in the pastoral’s formulation and content.

In the coming months, Hodges received varied responses: positive letters, such as that from Senator Robert C. Byrd; mostly receptive responses, such as a lengthy letter from West Virginia Governor Arch Moore; and sarcastically critical responses, such as one from Edward Wiles, who viewed “the document in much the same manner as expressed to you at the meeting in your office last year and, to a greater extent, in the Pittsburgh meeting,” concluding by calling the pastoral “a mistake.”

The bishops anticipated such varied reactions to the Appalachian pastoral. In the opening of This Land Is Home to Me, they responded to the concerns of people from differing perspectives, such as the coal companies:

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179 Bishop Joseph H. Hodges to Bishop Vincent M. Leonard, Letter, 20 February 1975, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
180 Bishop Wilburn C. Campbell to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, March 1975, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
181 John Klug, interview by author, June 2008, Wheeling, WV.
We know that there will be other opinions about the truth of Appalachia, other views than those of the poor. But we must remind ourselves that the poor are special in the eyes of God…

Even so, we know that our words are not perfect. For that reason, this letter is but one part of an unfinished conversation – with our people – with the truth of Appalachia – with the Living God.

Under the courageous leadership of Hodges, the bishops stood firm, as Henriot prayed that they would, refusing to back down from their critique of the powerlessness in Appalachia, proclaiming the good news to Appalachia and beyond.

Yet we still dare to speak, and to speak strongly, first, because we trust our people… and second, because we believe that the cry of the poor is also a message of hope…

They honored the process of dialogue – ‘trusting our people’ – and remained committed to the Church’s social mission.

The Upper Midwest Catholic Education Congress recognized the commitment to social justice present in the Appalachian pastoral during the annual awards ceremony of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis in October 17-18, 1975. The theme of that year’s congress was “Peace, Justice and the Bicentennial.” The Congress honored the pastoral letter as co-recipient of the award: “The Catholic Committee of Appalachia and

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the Appalachian Pastoral Letter, *This Land is Home to Me*, will share the cash award honors of this organization with Archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Brazil.”

According to an article in the *National Catholic Reporter*, the cash award amount exceeded $7000, and was collected through contributions by attendees of the Congress. In an announcement, John Klug of the Diocese of Wheeling explained why the Congress selected the pastoral as co-recipient during that year’s theme: “Cited for an ‘outstanding church effort in the field of social justice,’ the 7,000 member Congress of Catholic Educators has selected the Committee for its work on the Appalachian Pastoral Letter, *This Land is Home to Me*.” Klug accepted the award on behalf of all who worked on the pastoral. Archbishop Camara delivered the keynote address at the congress, speaking on the topic of “The Third World: A Problem of Justice.” The January 1976 CCA publication *Patchquilt* reported that “Archbishop Dom Helder Camara of Brazil has formally lauded the ‘letter’ during a major address in the United States.”

Such recognition given to the pastoral solidified the establishment of the Catholic Committee of Appalachia, which still operates today.

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The process of formulation and authorship revealed the application of universal Church teachings into a local context. *This Land Is Home to Me* faithfully appropriated the emerging understanding of the Church’s role in the modern world. Inspired by liberation theology, the Appalachian bishops, with CCA’s pastoral letter sub-committee,

184 John Klug to Bishop Joseph H. Hodges, Letter, 10 September 1975, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
186 JK [John Klug], “Announcement,” 8 September 1975, West Virginia Catholic Heritage Center, Wheeling, WV.
187 “The Pastoral,” *Patchquilt*. 

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produced a pastoral letter representative of the needs of the poor and powerless. In doing so, they listened to Catholics and non-Catholics throughout the thirteen-state Appalachian region, hearing their “hopes and joys,” that which is holy, beautiful and good, as well as their “griefs and anxieties,” that which is caused by evil, especially injustice. Emboldened by the Scriptures and Catholic social teaching, the bishops lent their collective voices in an unreserved choice for life and the living God. In their careful appropriation of the emerging understanding of Church, the Appalachian bishops produce a document – highly localized and catered to the needs of the Appalachian region in their specific historical moment – that would serve as a working model for other U.S. Catholic documents and as motivation for the creation of organizations inspired by the ‘Truth’ about life throughout Appalachia. The next chapter traces the lasting impact of This Land Is Home to Me on Catholicism in the U.S.
CHAPTER 3
Reactions to the Pastoral

The suffering of Appalachia’s poor
is a symbol
of so much suffering
-in our land
-in our world.
This Land Is Home to Me, Part I

The choice between the Living God
and inert idols
is not only a choice between justice
and injustice;
it is also a choice
between life and death.
This Land Is Home to Me, Part II

Although limitations to its reception existed, *This Land Is Home to Me* influenced subsequent U.S. Church documents and the formation of varied ministries because of the universality of the Appalachian pastoral’s core message and its successful appropriation of liberation theology and Vatican II themes into its local context. Namely, *This Land Is Home to Me* exalted the dignity of the human person, especially the poorest of the poor, and called all people to choose life – that which is ‘good and beautiful’ – and to counter evil, ‘especially injustice.’ Its unreserved advocacy of human dignity, the first principle of Catholic social teaching, inspired other Church documents to follow suit and to employ the see-judge-act praxis model of liberation theology in its collaboration with
the laity. Notable examples included the U.S. bishops’ pastoral letters on war and the economy, as well as the twentieth anniversary celebration of *This Land Is Home to Me* by the Appalachian bishops, *At Home in the Web of Life*. Emboldened by the Appalachian pastoral’s cry to promote human life and its flourishing, several justice-oriented ministries rose up throughout Appalachia in the decades since the pastoral’s promulgation, ranging from education, to social analysis, to an ecumenical monastery. Shortcomings to the pastoral’s influence existed, especially with regard to the average ‘person in the pew.’ Nevertheless, *This Land Is Home to Me* remains an historic pastoral, influencing Catholicism within Appalachia, as well as the U.S., because of the strength of its call to choose life.

**DIGNITY, JUSTICE AND LIFE**

Theologians have cast the Appalachian pastoral as a social justice document. In 1977, Church historian David J. O’Brien identified *This Land Is Home to Me* as “the finest of contemporary American documents on social justice” because it sought “to highlight a need, touch the conscience, call all persons to action.”¹⁸⁸ Years later, Bishop Walter Sullivan of Richmond, one of the original signers of the Appalachian pastoral, described it as “the finest ever written,” touching “the hearts and imaginations of all.”¹⁸⁹ However, more fundamentally, the pastoral can be viewed as a pro-life document in its concern for the dignity of the human person.

In no uncertain terms, *This Land Is Home to Me* differentiated that which is good from that which is evil in Appalachia’s social context. Ultimately, the good promoted human dignity, whereas the evil threatened it. Among the good and beautiful, the bishops extolled citizen involvement, nature’s beauty, song and poetry, education and dance. According to the bishops, such good things naturally presented themselves in Appalachian culture. Praising the children of the mountains, the bishops wrote:

> They sing of a life free and simple,  
> with time for one another,  
> and for people’s needs,  
> *based on the dignity of the human person,*  
> at one with nature’s beauty,  
> crowned with poetry.\(^{190}\)

Essentially, the good is good because it promotes human dignity and enables the soul to encounter the Living God.

In stark contrast, *This Land Is Home to Me* described much of the Appalachian social context as among that which is evil. The bishops presented examples of injustices such as powerlessness, smog and pollution, overproduction, overconsumption, and injustices in mines, farms, factories and unions. They considered these aspects to be evil because each attacked the dignity of the human person. Even more, such evil represented:

> …the power of an idol  
> which eats away at our openness to the Living God.\(^{191}\)

\(^{190}\) *This Land Is Home to Me*, Part I, emphasis added.  
\(^{191}\) Ibid.
Essentially, that which is evil threatens the dignity of the human person – created in the image of God, redeemed by Christ and called to everlasting life – because evil inhibits the soul’s ability to recognize and encounter the Living God.

Furthermore, *This Land Is Home to Me* explicitly linked “life” with “justice” throughout the text of the pastoral. Regarding the distinction between good and evil, the bishops wrote:

This is not to be simplistic, to see all in black and white… but in a profound sense the choices are simple and stark: -death or life; -injustice or justice; -idolatry or the Living God.

We must choose life. We must choose justice. We must choose the Living God.  

Fundamentally, justice concerns for the rights of the worker – fair wages, safe and decent employment, reasonable work hours, and so forth – revealed themselves to be concerns for life: does this situation of powerlessness in Appalachia promote human life and its flourishing? Quite clearly, the bishops answered, “no” because such situations caused people to “battle for dignity and security” (Part I). Essentially, the call for liberation is a call to promote human life and its flourishing. Wherever threats to human dignity prevail, the Church is called to rise up in defense of life.

Consequently, *This Land Is Home to Me*’s expression of powerlessness throughout the Appalachian region also described the threats to human life and its

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192 *This Land Is Home to Me*, Part II.
flourishing. Primarily, the Appalachian poor were not free to live up to their potential as human beings. They were weighed down by a system that did not care for the people, but for profit. Sometimes this threatened human life concretely, such as mining accidents and black lung; more prevalently it affected human flourishing. The universality of this basic gospel message of protecting life, especially the most vulnerable, is a major reason why the Appalachian pastoral influenced other Church documents and organizations. The pastoral arising from the experience of Appalachia – a symbol of national and international suffering – thus is relevant in its specificity and generality.

INFLUENCE ON CHURCH DOCUMENTS

The process of writing *This Land Is Home to Me* influenced the methodology and general principles of other U.S. Catholic pastorals, as well as the model of regional bishops jointly promulgating pastoral letters. Early in the process, John Barry recognized this potential impact of the pastoral beyond Appalachia: “This proposed pastoral is exceptional for two reasons: it would come from the bishops of a region, in this case Appalachia, the 13-state region designated by act of Congress; and it would include dialogue from grass-roots church people and the poor themselves.”¹⁹³ The second part of the quotation hinted at the methodology that would be appropriated in other pastorals; the first part revealed the notion of regional bishops joining their collective voices in a cry to promote life. The Appalachian bishops realized the monumental task they undertook, though they could not imagine how that would be lived.

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¹⁹³ Barry to Bishops of Appalachia, Letter, 8 February 1974.
The methodology used by the Appalachian bishops in writing *This Land Is Home to Me* influenced the writing of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) pastoral letters on war and on the economy. In 1982, the U.S. bishops decided to address the issue of war and peace. The NCCB appointed Joseph Cardinal Bernardin as the head of the NCCB/USCC Ad Hoc Committee on War and Peace; under his leadership, the NCCB published *The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promises and Our Response* (1983). Having served as the Archbishop of Cincinnati during the writing of *This Land Is Home to Me*, Bernardin and his committee employed the same methodology used in the Appalachian pastoral in the process of writing *The Challenge of Peace*. As the tenth anniversary celebration of the peace pastoral wrote: “The process of writing the pastoral was also an example of how church teaching can be enhanced by consultation and discussion.” In similar fashion, the NCCB undertook the writing of *Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy*. The introduction of the pastoral explained: “This pastoral letter has been a work of careful inquiry, wide consultation, and prayerful discernment. The letter has been greatly enriched by this process of listening and refinement.” Both pastorals applied Church teaching to specific moral problems in a defense of human life.

If the process of *This Land Is Home to Me* had failed, or if it had produced a mediocre, watered-down document, then it is feasible to suggest that the U.S. bishop’s documents on war and the economy may not have been produced, or at the very least, not produced under the same methodology. Had the process not worked for the Appalachian

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pastoral, then Bernardin probably would not have ventured to use it again in the writing of The Challenge of Peace. In a sense, This Land Is Home to Me became a test on a small scale to determine if such methodology could be appropriated on a larger scale. Issues of war and of the economy are issues about human life and its flourishing, not just for some or for the majority, but for all. As history has revealed, the method was useful and a truthful expression of the relationship among laity, religious and ordained that led to the prophetic writing of a document decrying injustices and promoting human life and its flourishing in Appalachia.

Furthermore, the Appalachian bishops initiated the concept of bishops in a region joining together in writing a document in the U.S. They also continued the tradition of taking a preferential option for the poor – to choose life – in the publication of a pastoral letter for a specific region. Others that have followed suit include: What We Have Seen and Heard: A Pastoral on Evangelization from the Black Bishops of the United States (1984); Reforming Welfare by Valuing Families: A Statement from the Roman Catholic Bishops of Wisconsin (1995); The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good - An International Pastoral Letter by the Catholic Bishops of the Region (2000); as well as the follow-up pastoral by the Appalachian bishops, At Home in the Web of Life (1995).196

At Home in the Web of Life: A Pastoral Message on Sustainable Communities in Appalachia Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of This Land Is Home to Me from the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia (1995) explicitly categorized the situation in Appalachia

196 Additionally, Bishop Michael Bransfield, current bishop of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston, issued two pastoral letters in the spirit of This Land Is Home to Me: one health care called A Church that Heals (2006), and one on mine safety in the wake of the Upper Big Branch Mine disaster in Montcoal, WV called On My Holy Mountain: Mine Safety in West Virginia (2010).
within the culture of life / culture of death framework. This pastoral broadened the focus on powerlessness, injustice, and threats to life to include God’s good creation, so abundantly obvious to those familiar with the geography of Appalachia. The bishops describe the distinction as follows:

Twenty years ago we issued the Appalachian pastoral letter from the Catholic bishops of the region. At that time our focus was mainly on the economic and political plight of the poor in the midst of a flourishing industrial system. Now, twenty years later, we see people being abandoned and the region’s ecology being attacked by a postindustrial system with little or no accountability to local human communities nor to the wider web of life.

Therefore, the need for transformation is even greater than before. To some, such transformation may seem impossible. But we continue to believe in the spiritual depth and creativity of the people of Appalachia. We believe that they can find a way to remain at home in the web of life.197

Thematically, while the first pastoral concerns itself with the plight of the people, the second brings into the conversation the condition of the land.

In the pastoral’s content, care for creation became part of “choosing life.” Joe Holland also authored this pastoral, appropriating the same praxis methodology and the same poetic writing style. Again in three parts, with an Introduction and Conclusion, the

197 Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, *At Home in the Web of Life: A Pastoral Message on Sustainable Communities in Appalachia Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of This Land Is Home to Me from the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia* (1995), Conclusion.
bishops begin by praising the good work that has been done in the previous two decades; they then call to light the present issue of sustainability and the need for a ‘culture of life,’ in the words of Pope John Paul II. In Part I “Web of Life,” the bishops acknowledge that all of creation reveals the Creator God and offer a brief history of human forgetfulness of that truth throughout the Appalachian region, particularly during the Industrial and Post-Industrial Ages. In Part II “The Bible and the Church’s Teaching,” the bishops reflect on the need for sustainable living in light of scripture and the key themes of Catholic Social Teaching (such as human dignity, subsidiarity and ecology). In Part III “The Call of the Spirit,” the bishops situate the suggestions for action within a sustainability framework, the seventh principle of Catholic Social Teaching, recommending various aspects of sustainable communities, including development, agriculture, forestry, ownership, cultures, families, and churches. They conclude the pastoral in praise of the many good efforts already underway and a challenge to continue the struggle. At Home in the Web of Life’s final words quote the conclusion of This Land Is Home to Me.

The opening of At Home in the Web of Life commended the various people who heard the call of This Land Is Home to Me and responded in significant ways. The bishops wrote,

We praise all the wonderful things that so many good folks have done to defend the Appalachian land as their home.

In particular we praise the work of many Catholic sisters, as well as many lay church workers, who heard the call of our first pastoral letter and came to the region to learn from the local people.
and to share their own gifts.\textsuperscript{198}

This section turns from official Church proclamations to individual and communal witnesses of Catholics embodying and choosing life in various forms throughout Appalachia in the decades since its promulgation. The existence of these communities and organizations can be traced directly back to \textit{This Land Is Home to Me}, which served as each one’s inspiration. Without the Appalachian pastoral, these ministries might not have emerged.

\textbf{INFLUENCE ON INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANIZATIONS}

One of the most significant responses to the pastoral came from the many women and men, religious and lay, who heard the call of the pastoral and responded with life commitments. There are countless stories of women and men committing themselves to the Appalachian people, land and culture. A limited number of responses are discussed below.

\textit{Education: Big Laurel Learning Center and Web of Life Ecology Center}

The founding of Big Laurel Learning Center in 1976 served as one example among many of committed religious women hearing the call of \textit{This Land Is Home to Me} and responding with a life dedicated to promoting life and its flourishing among Appalachia’s poor. \textit{This Land Is Home to Me} commended many aspects of ‘native’ Appalachian culture as part of choosing life and the living God. Though not directly

\begin{footnotesize}\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., Introduction.\end{footnotesize}
mentioned, the preservation of mountain schools is consistent with that which is good in Appalachian culture.

The idea for a mountain school near Kermit, West Virginia originated with Edwina S. Pepper, a somewhat privileged woman who returned to Mingo County in 1945. Due to school consolidation, her two young great-nephews traveled three miles by foot to catch a bus that drove them ten miles to the grade school and twenty miles to the high school. Their experience implanted in Pepper the desire to revive the mountain school. Sr. Gretchen Shaffer, a co-founder of Big Laurel Learning Center, explained the rationale for the mountain school: “This community wanted to start their own personal school, not only to make a regular education available to the children but also to capitalize on values that are present in living in the country, living in a mountainous area…to keep alive the culture and ideas that are indigenous to this area.” In November 1973, Pepper with her nephews, now college-educated adults, advertised for teachers: “Mountain community is looking for a young couple, one or both with teaching certification, to start a mountain school. House site with spring and garden plot available for lease.” Their vision remained dormant until the summer of 1976.

Two religious sisters became the founding teachers of Big Laurel when it opened in August 1976. Independently, Sr. Gretchen Shaffer, SSJ and Sr. Kathy O’Hagan, SND heard the call of This Land Is Home to Me and sought to find a way to respond with life dedication. A native West Virginian, Shaffer understood the cry of the pastoral in light of her personal call to education and social ministry; previously, she served as a teacher,

199 “Interview with a Teacher,” The Mountain Call: For the Mountains, the People, the Culture, October-November 1977, 13, Big Laurel Learning Center files, Kermit, WV.
200 The Mountain Call: For the Mountains, the People, the Culture, November 1973, 1, Big Laurel Learning Center files, Kermit, WV.
principal, and director of Catholic Charities. Pepper’s phone call to Shaffer in the spring of 1976 answered Shaffer’s desire to serve the people of Appalachia through educational ministry.

Similarly, O’Hagan understood the call of *This Land Is Home to Me* in light of her religious order’s dedication to “serve the poor in the most abandoned places.” Previously this call led her to inner-city education in Baltimore, Maryland and Queens Village, New York; with the Appalachian pastoral’s promulgation, O’Hagan felt called to a new locale. She pasted the pastoral in her pink-covered journal for prayer and reflection. In February 1976, she traveled by train to meet Pepper in Big Laurel; overwhelmed by the task, she returned to Queens intending not to move to West Virginia. However, in June 1976, O’Hagan learned that Shaffer accepted the invitation to start the mountain school and found the courage to serve the poor in the mountains of West Virginia. Together, Shaffer and O’Hagan became the founding teachers of Big Laurel Learning Center.

Establishing the mountain school did not prove to be an easy task. The first year, the sisters held class in the wood shop, while community members built what became the schoolhouse for the next year. Their first winter proved to be challenging too, as “we passed the ‘worst winter in 100 years’ snug on a mountain ridge being denied only what we couldn’t make, improvise or walk to.”

Five years later they would describe their move in the following way:

You’ve heard of the primrose path where the unwitting dupe is led to the proverbial downfall. Who would have guessed that that same path would lead two intrepid women to such an adventure as we’ve found in the Big Laurel

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community in Mingo County, W.Va. True we had traveled hard roads and encountered tough opposition in our struggle for justice; and equally true the immediate call to justice, *This Land is Home to Me* did not mention any rose gardens. But helping folks start a small school for a few children in a lush and sheltering forest didn’t seem all that forbidding. We came to serve those in need.\(^{202}\)

For about twelve years Big Laurel Learning preserved mountain culture with a flexible curriculum. When the school closed in 1988, in Sr. Kathy’s words, they ‘prayed and did what the Spirit called you to.’ Eventually, the Spirit led them to establish the Web of Life Ecology Center.

*At Home in the Web of Life* directly inspired the sisters of Big Laurel to establish the ecology center as a ‘mountaintop renewal site.’ Part of the ecology center’s ministry is to live out the call to sustainability. Inspired by this, the ecology center employs sustainable practices such as water collection, composting toilets, outdoor showers, and composting. Part of their outreach includes hosting student immersion trips, summer camps for pre-teens and teens, and outdoor classroom experiences. Thirty-five years later, Shaffer and O’Hagan continue to live out the call of the Appalachian pastorals.

**Women’s Ministry: In Praise of Mountain Women**

In 1985, tens years after *This Land Is Home to Me*’s promulgation, the Women’s Task Force of the CCA decided to pay tribute to the many women they encountered in the mountains. The Appalachian pastoral specifically expressed gratitude for the role of women in Appalachia:

> We especially thank women in the region,

\(^{202}\) Ibid.
for we cannot but note the great role women have played here in the struggle for justice. In the contemporary mission of the Church, the voice and action of women bring a special charism to the struggle for justice.  

The CCA Women’s Task Force desired to voice further praise for inspirational women materialized in the publication of a book entitled *In Praise of Mountain Women* (1988). They directed the funds from the sale to host the first biannual Gathering in 1991; since then, seven more Gatherings have been held in West Virginia, Virginia, Kentucky and Tennessee for the purpose of “learning/teaching mountain women skills; celebrating our strengths; and taking time to relax and be with other women.”  

The theme of the 2009 Gathering was “Celebrating Our Home Place: This Earth Is Home to Me.” Their current Roundtable (i.e. board of directors) includes Beth Davies, Gretchen Shaffer, Anne Leibig, Monica Appleby, and Marie Cirillo, among others. *In Praise of Mountain Women* views itself as an outreach ministry to women in Appalachia.  

Combating Absentee Land Ownership: The Woodland Community Land Trust  

In 1977, FOCIS member Marie Cirillo challenged absentee landownership so prevalent throughout Appalachia by establishing the Woodland Community Land Trust in the Clearfork Valley (Tennessee). At the time, absentee companies owned ninety percent of the land in the Clearfork Valley; the American Association, a British company,  

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203 Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, *This Land Is Home to Me*, Conclusion.  
205 The CCA commended In Praise of Mountain Women at the CCA Annual Meeting in Sept. 2010 for answering the call of *This Land Is Home to Me*.  

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alone owned 40,000 acres. Thus, Cirillo established the community land trust in order “to acquire a land base that will allow for diversified housing options, sustainable income production opportunities, social and educational services, and for a cohesive community development effort.”

It began with seventeen donated acres and soon acquired forty more. Now, four hundred acres of land comprise the Woodland Community Land Trust, with twenty-one families residing there. It promotes reforestation and the resettlement of families. At the CCA Annual Meeting (September 2010), the CCA recognized the efforts of Cirillo and the Land Trust as answering the call of This Land Is Home to Me.

Prayer: Diocesan Pastoral Centers and Mt. Tabor Monastery

The Appalachian pastoral recommended creating places for prayer where the soul can encounter the Living God. In particular, it recommended the establishment of ‘centers of prayer and reflection.’ In the words of the pastoral,

First, and most important, in accord with our recommendation from the Synod document, Justice in the World, we would like to commend where they exist and recommend where they do not, Centers of Reflection and Prayer, in the service of action, throughout the region.

Actual examples of this manifested itself in varied ways in the wake of the pastoral. Diocesan pastoral centers and Mt. Tabor Monastery serve as examples.

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207 Catholic Bishops of Appalachia, This Land Is Home to Me, Part III.
In West Virginia, Bishop Hodges established and dedicated four pastoral centers in the late 1970s and early 1980s.\(^{208}\) They include John XXIII Pastoral Center (Charleston), Paul VI Pastoral Center (Wheeling), Bishop Hodges Pastoral Center (Huttonsville), and PriestField Pastoral Center (Kearneysville). According to John XXIII’s website, “The four Pastoral Centers of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston were conceived of, planned, and constructed by Bishop Joseph Hodges. His vision was that these centers be extensions of the bishop; his vision, his teaching, his ministry.”\(^{209}\) The website quotes the pastoral letter as quoted below and offers further description of the Church’s mission. It states, “The Pastoral Centers are to be places for gathering and meeting, for coming together and experiencing church. They are to be centers of education, formation, spiritual growth, communal and human development. In them, the mission of the Church is to be furthered, the Gospel proclaimed and witnessed to and the Lord of Faith is to be experienced as Prophet, Servant, Healer, Teacher, Sanctifier.”\(^{210}\) Each of the four pastoral centers still operates today.

*This Land Is Home to Me* inspired the founding sisters of the Mt. Tabor Benedictines to establish a place of prayer in eastern Kentucky. Mt. Tabor is an ecumenical monastery in the Benedictine tradition located in Martin, Kentucky. Their website explains Mt. Tabor’s recent history: “Realizing that women of many Christian faiths could embrace the Benedictine life, we established ourselves in 2004 as the Mt. Tabor Benedictines. This formalized a decades-long journey toward ecumenical Christian

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\(^{210}\) Ibid. It should be noted that Hodges’ establishment of these pastorals centers is more concurrent with the time following the Appalachian pastoral than directly inspired by the pastoral.
The CCA recognized Mt. Tabor’s unique response to the call of the Appalachian pastoral at the CCA Annual meeting in September 2010.

Centers of Reflection and Analysis: The Appalachian Institute and the Catholic Conference of West Virginia

The Appalachian bishops further outlined the task and purpose of such centers in the establishment of a more just order:

Such centers could integrate the analytical social science skills and the profound spirituality necessary for persevering creativity in the struggle for justice. They could also link fragmented struggles from different parts of the region, and even outside the region, thus supporting healthy localism with the richness of a wider national and international network.212

Since its promulgation in 1975, centers of prayer and reflection have developed in various forms, including the Appalachian Institute and the Catholic Conference of West Virginia.

The Clifford J. Lewis Appalachian Institute (AI) on the campus of Wheeling Jesuit University was established in 2003 as a direct realization of This Land Is Home to Me’s call for pastoral centers. Fr. Joseph Hacala, SJ, a native of Charleston, West Virginia, conceived of the idea for AI. The Appalachian pastoral deeply influenced Hacala as a young Jesuit – his ordination was the same year as the pastoral’s promulgation – and throughout his life. In 2003, with funding from the Rockefeller

212 Ibid.
Foundation, Hacala created AI. He envisioned AI to be a “center of research and analysis, education and action attuned always to the struggles and dreams of the Appalachian people.” Furthermore, their website states, “Reflecting the values of its culture and the values and ethics embodied in the Appalachian Bishops’ pastoral letters, the Institute joins in the region’s work of building a sustainable and promising future.”

In the past few years, AI has dedicated itself to researching Appalachian issues, holding conferences, and hosting exhibits. Furthermore, AI holds training sessions for the leaders of groups making an immersion trip in Appalachia. During the training, leaders learn about the Appalachian pastorals, community involvement and partnership, religion and culture, among others. For the November 2010 training, leaders came from schools such as Seattle University (Washington), Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.), and St. Louis University (Missouri) to gain valuable information that helped prepare them and their fellow volunteers for their service trip. In spite of Hacala’s early death in February 2007, AI continues the mission.

Additionally, the Catholic Conference of West Virginia keeps abreast of political issues in the state. Its purpose is “to give witness to spiritual values in public affairs and to influence those making decisions regarding social policies to make such decisions in congruence with Catholic social teachings.” It keeps abreast of justice issues in the state and advocates based on Church teaching in an effort “to realize the vision of the

214 Ibid.
215 AI afforded me the opportunity to lead the breakout session on the Appalachian pastorals at the Nov. 2010 AI training. I was impressed that AI offers such a cultural training and inspired by the enthusiasm and dedication of the immersion trip leaders to fully engage in and prepare for their mission trips to Appalachia.
Appalachian Bishops in "This Land is Home to Me" (1975). Namely, the Conference formulates policy positions on legislative issues, represents the Catholic Church before the state government, and educates the public about Catholic teaching on morality.

*Sustainable Community: Bethlehem Farm*

In 2005, the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston established Bethlehem Farm as a lay community dedicated to the people of West Virginia. The farm’s vision finds roots in the Appalachian pasturals. As their vision statement explicitly states, “Bethlehem Farm is a Catholic home repair ministry located in Appalachia. Our ministry is based on the Gospels and the Catholic Social Teachings, looking to the pastoral letters *This Land is Home to Me* and *At Home in the Web of Life* for further inspiration and guidance.” It envisioned itself as ‘a center of prayer and reflection,’ according to founder Eric Fitts. In particular, its dedication to sustainability – in its agricultural and environmental meanings, as well as spiritual ones – finds it roots in the follow-up pastoral to *This Land Is Home to Me* – the 1995 *At Home in the Web of Life*. A small group of full-time caretakers host service and prayer groups and try to live sustainably in the mountains of West Virginia. The farm is diocesan-owned, but lay-run.

**LIMITATIONS OF INFLUENCE**

In spite of the above evidence suggesting *This Land Is Home to Me*’s influence on subsequent U.S. church documents and on various Appalachian ministries, it could be

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217 Ibid.
argued that the pastoral remained somewhat obscure in U.S. Catholic history. Catholics comprise a relatively small percentage of the Appalachian population; perhaps the above account is inflated or exaggerated. Furthermore, a church-going Catholic living in Appalachia might object that he or she had never heard of *This Land Is Home to Me*, despite the distribution of more than 200,000 copies in the years following its promulgation.

Those responsible for the dissemination of the Appalachian pastoral concerned themselves with the pastoral’s reception among Appalachian Catholics, especially those living outside of Central Appalachia, from the beginning of the pastoral’s implementation. The National Assembly of Women Religious sponsored a workshop on the pastoral in March 1975 at Spalding College in Louisville, KY; Marie Cirillo, in her position within the Department of Rural Development for the Diocese of Nashville, was a key speaker at this event. Similarly, in 1977, Wheeling College hosted a conference on the pastoral from May 22 to May 25. Rev. Tom Peyton, MM described the need for the conference as a lack of implementation by church leadership: “not all dioceses whose Bishops signed the letter have the same awareness of or involvement in Appalachian ministry.”

Organized by Jim O’Brien, SJ, the conference’s stated purpose was “to learn, share, and brainstorm on how priests councils can serve the progress of the Appalachian Pastoral.” Bishop Hodges delivered the keynote address, “The

[219] “Justice Education Workshop: A Response to *This Land Is Home to Me,*” Brochure, undated, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV. Other presenters included Mary Anne Guthrie, OP, Majorie Tuite, OP and Gwen McMahon, SCN; each represented the National Assembly of Women Religious.

[220] Rev. Tom Peyton, MM to Presidents and Justice and Peace Contacts of Priests Councils of Diocese within the Appalachian Region, “An Invitation to meet and review the progress of the Appalachian Pastoral, “This Land Is Home to Me,”” undated, Catholic Committee of Appalachia files, Spencer, WV.

[221] Ibid.
Appalachian Pastoral Two Years Later.” Clearly, those in leadership expressed concern for raising awareness of the pastoral among the twenty-six dioceses within the Appalachian region. Nevertheless, the argument remains valid that limitations to *This Land Is Home to Me*’s influence existed.

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The successful appropriation of Vatican II themes in the U.S. Catholic context, especially collaboration among the laity, religious and bishops, and the vocalization of the Church’s social mission in a strong cry to promote life, enabled other official Church documents to follow suit. The pastoral also inspired the emergence of various ministries throughout Appalachia. Ultimately, thirty-six years after its promulgation, *This Land Is Home to Me* continues to inspire justice-oriented ministries throughout Appalachia because of the universality of its call to promote life and its flourishing today.
CONCLUSION

The Dream of the Mountains’ Struggle

The dream of the mountains’ struggle,
the dream of simplicity
and of justice,
like so many other repressed visions
is, we believe,
the voice of Yahweh among us.
This Land Is Home to Me, Conclusion

In This Land Is Home to Me, the Catholic bishops of Appalachia set a precedent for U.S. bishops. Like their Latin American brothers, they took a ‘preferential option for the poor,’ explicitly siding with the oppressed and with their land. Their letter encouraged those already working for justice in the region, while captivating the hearts and minds of many others who were prepared already to hear and respond to the pastoral’s call.

Today, the call still resounds. Appalachians are disproportionately poor, their land disproportionately devastated. Much hinders the realization of the Appalachian pastoral’s vision. Hope in the dream of the mountains’ struggle, however, is not squandered, nor will it be, so long as people reflect prayerfully, creatively and intelligently on Appalachia’s situation in light of the sacred scripture and the Church’s rich tradition.
Today, the major injustice emerges in mountaintop removal (MTR) – an issue yet untouched in official Church documents, though one close to those living in the region and working for justice. The various language used to describe the practice of MTR suggests a tension between those in favor and those against MTR. In a (predictably) sympathetic description, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE), in the U.S. Department of the Interior, states, “Mountaintop removal is a method of surface coal mining where the land is not returned to its original contour to achieve a specific land use following mining equal to or better than the pre-mining land use.” OSMRE’s definition is procedural in description and optimistic in its hopes that mountains can be transformed into something more ‘useful,’ as are MTR’s proponents. By contrast, hear the following description: “Rather than cut contours around mountainsides to expose individual seams, miners attack from above, fracturing the overburden with explosives, then stripping away rock and dirt.” Attack, fracture, strip – aggressive and violent verbs to describe an unnecessarily aggressive and violent practice.

This surface mining practice is violent and aggressive both to the Appalachian ecosystem – perhaps most obviously – and to the communities of Appalachia. MTR causes permanent destruction of fragile ecosystems, while polluting water and air. Simultaneously, the practice threatens human life and flourishing, damaging property, endangering lives due to coal impoundments and flooding, and destroying communities through depopulation.

It should be noted that proponents of MTR do not view the practice in such manner. The prospect of decent employment for areas suffering from under- and unemployment is the main argument currently invoked by coal interests in favor of MTR sites, reflecting the longstanding claim coal has made throughout the decades: Appalachia needs jobs. Additionally, proponents claim higher safety levels for workers at surface mining sites, such as MTR, as opposed to the traditional underground mining technique. Regarding the land, proponents claim that the reclamation process successfully returns the land to the approximate original contour, or to flatter, but useful land.

Opponents challenge such claims, bringing to the forefront the destructive nature of the practice. A particularly silent and disturbing social cost of the practice is the threat of depopulation. In Bringing Down the Mountains: The Impact of Mountaintop Removal on Southern West Virginia Communities, 1970-2004, Shirley Stewart Burns discusses the power that coal companies exercise over entire communities, outlining a three-stage process of depopulation. First, the coal companies move in, promising to be good neighbors, and hopefulness characterizes the general communal attitude towards the prospect of economic opportunities. In the second stage, some residents begin leaving the area, having grown weary from social impacts, such as property damage and threats from coal impoundments, and from environmental costs, such as valley fills that bury streams; others remain in their homes, grateful for the few jobs afforded by MTR. In stage three, massive numbers of community members sell their homes to the coal companies, leaving the homes of their ancestors. Burns observes that “throughout all three stages, the power relationship remains the same; coal corporations enjoy the upper
In essence, against the desires of the community, the coal company depopulates the area, closing schools and businesses. The gravity of the situation has some people calling for a third pastoral letter from the Catholic bishops of Appalachia to address specifically the issue of MTR. Such pastoral could combine the concern for the poor explicit in *This Land Is Home to Me* and the call to sustainability in *At Home in the Web of Life* to address both the social and environmental costs of MTR. Following the see-judge-act methodology of liberation theology would be appropriate. Already many religious-based groups and citizen groups organize tours of MTR sites so that visitors may see for themselves the irreversible damage; current CCA director John Rausch, for example, actively leads pilgrimages to MTR sites. Judgments are being made on this situation and actions are being taken.

The Appalachian bishops could lend their collective voice of wisdom to this issue, drawing attention even more to the injustices of MTR and situating this issue within the larger issue of global climate change, one that has been addressed already by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

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The “dream of the mountain’s struggle” perseveres in the face of such situations throughout the region. The psalmist’s hope for freedom from oppression and great abundance from the hills lives on in the memory of those who laid a foundation for working for justice in the region – such as Bishop Hodges, Les Schmidt, and John Barry; continues in the lives of countless many exhibiting lifelong dedication to the region – such as Sr. Gretchen Shaffer SSJ, Sr. Kathy O’Hagan SND, John Klug, Fr. Jim O’Brien, and Bishop Walter Sullivan; and is sustained in the future by many who were not yet born at the time of the original pastoral’s promulgation – such as the volunteers at Big Laurel and the folks at Bethlehem Farm. Indeed, *This Land Is Home to Me* has moved and encouraged many in the pursuit of justice for Appalachia.

As the Spirit continues to work through the people of region, may we keep in mind the closing words of *This Land Is Home to Me*:

Dear sisters and brothers,
we urge all of you
not to stop living,
to be a part of the rebirth of utopias,
to recover and defend the struggling dream of Appalachia itself.
For it is the weak things of this world which seem like folly,
that the Spirit takes up
and makes its own.
The dream of the mountains' struggle,
the dream of simplicity
and of justice,
like so many other repressed visions
is, we believe,
the voice of Yahweh among us.

In taking them up,
hopefully the Church
might once again
be known as
- a center of the Spirit,
- a place where poetry dares to speak,
- where the song reigns unchallenged,
- where art flourishes,
- where nature is welcome,
- where little people and little needs come first,
- where justice speaks loudly,
- where in a wilderness of idolatrous destruction the great voice of God still cries out for Life.
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