

Statement to the Public Hearing
of the
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)
SUNY-Sullivan, Loch Sheldrake, NY, November 29, 2012

Why I'm Opposed to Hydraulic Fracturing

The Rev. Canon Jeff Gollhofer, Ph.d.
Vicar, St. John's Episcopal Church, Ellenville, NY
and
Environmental Consultant to the Anglican Communion Office
at the United Nations

I'm here as a concerned citizen, a scientist, and as an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of New York. I'm the Vicar of St. John's Episcopal Church in Ellenville, only a few miles down the road. I want to thank the DEC for scheduling this hearing and for the opportunity to speak.

Our diocese includes sixty-two thousand members in New York City and seven counties to the north – Putnam, Rockland, Westchester, Dutchess, Orange, Sullivan, and Ulster. I recognize the different points of view concerning hydraulic fracturing, but because of the challenges that our communities face, especially in this region, I advise strongly against it.

The most important reason for this position is not difficult to explain: Our member congregations are all part of communities, and we're concerned about every part of community life that the issue of hydraulic-fracturing raises – from threats to property values, and heavy traffic on our roads, to the hazardous chemicals that will be put into the environment. I know what the reports have said on different sides of this issue, but there comes a point when the issue comes down to basic safety and risks. The question for us is: What kind of risk are we willing to take? High on our list of priorities is the quality of groundwater, which must be protected – so I want to focus on that.

As much as industry says that risks have been reduced, and that technology has become more safe and reliable, we all know that accidents happen. They always happen, and always will. The problem is there is no acceptable risk with regard to water. We drink it, grow food, and clean ourselves with it. In the church, we baptize people with it. For all these reasons, water is sacred. This is not negotiable – no level of debate can change that, no amount of money spent to influence peoples' opinions will alter this basic fact.

It is painfully obvious to anyone living in this part of New York that jobs are a significant issue. A whole generation has suffered the loss of work. What we need is

for economic opportunity to return. In order for that to happen, we must maintain a level of environmental quality that will keep this area not only attractive to tourism, but also lucrative to investment. Deep drilling will bring some jobs in the short-term. But the very last thing that we need now is another threat to the possibility of a sustainable economy. Once mistakes are made affecting our groundwater, and they will be made, no businesses will want to invest their resources here over the long-term. Polluted water isn't good for people, and it's not good for business.

All the different facts and opinions expressed here point to a moral decision that must be made. We might, under some circumstances, say, "we're willing to take some risk," as we should. Life always involves risk. But taking risks does not and should not mean gambling with our health and livelihoods. It does mean facing the realities of life everyday like being able to pay the bills, and putting healthy food on the table. It means taking the lives of people into account. When we think about them, as we consider the issue before us today, good intentions aren't good enough. It won't be good enough to look back and say, "we meant well."

I'm a priest, and like I said, I'm a trained scientist too, and I know that as complicated as some issues can sometimes seem, the issue before us today is not one of them. To put our communities and the health of the people who live here at risk is not an acceptable option.

Thank you.