

I am Sharon Baiocco, a member of Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church Unitarian Universalist in Charlottesville. My friends and I are members of one of six national faith denominations that have passed resolutions condemning mountaintop removal coal mining. Together with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church of the USA, and the Religious Society of Friends, we argue that mountaintop removal coal mining and the resulting environmental devastation it brings ought to end immediately because it is immoral. Despite claims to the contrary, it irreversibly destroys the oldest mountains in the world -- the sacred home of people, wildlife, and flora.

500 mountains have already been destroyed, a good number in southwest Virginia and particularly Wise County, for questionable economic benefit. Cheap coal is no reason to recklessly pollute our watersheds and threaten the health and welfare of the people of Appalachia and Virginia. We humans are inextricably bound to the land; we have a spiritual connection to the mountains, the waters, and the air. Anyone who sees the mountaintop removal sites or photos of them, KNOWS in their hearts how very wrong this mining method is.

The faith communities of America are organizing across this nation to reverse the laws that allow mountaintop removal coal mining – and we will not be silent. In the end, like the civil rights movement, we will succeed because our cause is just. Virginia has the opportunity to join other states who have outlawed mountaintop removal. It was among the last to ban smoking in public places to protect the health and welfare of its citizens. Let it not be the last in forbidding mountaintop removal coal mining.