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**“Breath to the People: Sacred Air and Toxic Pollution”:**

**News conference speakers**

*“Breath to the People: Sacred Air and Toxic Pollution” is a report prepared for the* [*United Church of Christ*](https://www.ucc.org/) *by the* [*Environmental Integrity Project*](https://environmentalintegrity.org/)*, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization established in 2002 by two former Environmental Protection Agency enforcement attorneys to advocate for effective enforcement of environmental laws. It was released at a news conference on Ash Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2020, at the United Methodist Building on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Here are the speakers at that news conference[[1]](#endnote-1).*

**The Rev.** **Brooks Berndt**, UCC Minister for Environmental Justice

* Based in Cleveland with the UCC’s national Justice and Local Church Ministries, he was the church’s project leader for the report. More at [ucc.org/environmental-ministries](https://www.ucc.org/environmental-ministries)

**Yvette Arellano**, Policy Advocate and Grassroots Organizer, Texas Justice Environmental Advocacy Services

* Houston-based TEJAS promotes environmental protection through education, policy development, community awareness, and legal action. More at [tejasbarrios.org](http://tejasbarrios.org/)

**Amariee Collins-Lawrence,** concerned Houston-area resident

* She is a medical practitioner, community organizer, Air Force veteran, mother of three sons, and a member of Immanuel United Church, a UCC congregation in Spring, Tex.

**The Rev.** **Traci Blackmon**, UCC Associate General Minister, Justice and Local Church Ministries

* Under her leadership, JLCM – which includes the denomination’s national environmental justice ministry – undertook the “Breath to the People” project. She is one of three elected Officers in the national setting of the UCC. More at [ucc.org/about-us\_meet-our-officers](https://www.ucc.org/about-us_meet-our-officers)

**The Rev.** **Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.,** Former Executive Director, UCC Commission for Racial Justice

* Under his leadership, the Commission released its groundbreaking 1987 report, “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States.” [drbenjaminfchavisjr.wixsite.com/drbfc/biography](https://drbenjaminfchavisjr.wixsite.com/drbfc/biography)

**Courtney Bernhardt**, Director of Research, Environmental Integrity Project

* The report’s lead researcher, she is based in D.C. More at [environmentalintegrity.org](https://environmentalintegrity.org/)

**U.S. Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee**, Texas, 18th Congressional District

* Her district is centered in Houston. More at [jacksonlee.house.gov](https://jacksonlee.house.gov/)

**The Rev. Susan Hendershot**, President, Interfaith Power & Light

* News conference co-sponsor IPL “inspires and mobilizes people of faith and conscience to take bold and just action on climate change.” More at [interfaithpowerandlight.org](https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/)

**The Rev.** **Melanie Mullen**, Director of Reconciliation, Justice and Creation Care, The Episcopal Church

* Leader of an Ash Wednesday ritual concluding the news conference, including the imposition of ashes. Based in D.C., she directs a ministry department of that U.S. Anglican denomination. More at [episcopalchurch.org/department/reconciliation-justice-creation-care](https://episcopalchurch.org/department/reconciliation-justice-creation-care)

*February 2020*

1. As of Feb. 21, 2020, these speakers were scheduled to appear in this order at the news conference. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)