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CONTACT: Valerie Lapin
(650)455-3300

Attention Assignment Editors, Correspondents and Reporters:
Media Advisory and Daybook Item for Thursday, May 15, 2008

Interfaith Clergy to Bless the Oakland Port Truck Fleet

OAKLAND – In the wake of a wildcat strike over soaring \$4.50 per gallon diesel prices that shut down the Port of Oakland, faith leaders representing a broad spectrum of religious traditions will take their ministries to the port, the workplace of more than 1,500 Port truck drivers, to listen to concerns about the harsh circumstances independent truckers are forced to toil in. Port truck drivers work for poverty wages without benefits such as health care while they breathe polluted air associated with cancer and asthma. The clergy leaders will offer the truck drivers blessings in a show of support for the drivers in their fight to improve their working conditions.

Who: Pastors, rabbis, priests and other spiritual leaders who are members of the East Bay Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice and Oakland Port truck drivers

What: Blessing of the Truck Fleet

When: Thursday, May 15 at 11:30am

Where: Gathering at Middle Harbor Road, just west of the Adeline Street Bridge (See attached map.) for an opening prayer. The clergy will then disperse throughout the Port walking from truck to truck talking with drivers and offering them prayers as they wait in long lines for cargo loads.

Visuals: Clergy leaders performing religious blessings as they visit drivers as they wait in line at the Port in their trucks. Various interfaith traditions of blessings will be shared including the Catholic tradition of blessing with holy water as well as Protestant 'laying on of hands' as faith leaders pray for drivers' health and safety. Clergy will leave prayer cards with green ribbons hanging from truck mirrors symbolizing a clean a safe working environment and community.

Why: Oakland Port truck drivers are forced to work in "sweatshops on wheels." Big box retailers like Wal-Mart, Target and Home Depot are fueling a race to the bottom by forcing trucking companies to compete by undercutting each other and paying drivers less. The trucking companies hire "independent contractors" who are responsible for owning and maintaining trucks and paying for diesel fuel. The drivers are paid by the load at rates that are less than the cost of moving the goods. The result is a workforce that lives in poverty.

After clearing expenses, many drivers make as little as \$8 an hour and receive no benefits. They can barely support their families and cannot afford health care let alone clean emission trucks that will be required by new State air quality standards. The consequence is labor unrest and old, dirty trucks on the road.

Last week, a crisis hit the Port of Oakland when hundreds of truck drivers went on a wildcat strike over rising diesel prices. Worker frustration ran so high there were reports of vandalism including damaged trucks and rock throwing.

The broken port trucking system forces drivers to sit idling for hours waiting for cargo loads while their trucks spew out toxic diesel emissions associated with high rates of cancer and asthma that the drivers and residents of the surrounding port communities are forced to breathe.

According to a recent report by the Natural Resources Defense Council entitled “Driving on Fumes: Truck Drivers Face Elevated Health Risks from Diesel Pollution,” the amount of diesel particulate matter found inside the truck cabs was double the level considered acceptable by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and up to 2,000 times greater than the level typically considered acceptable by state and federal environmental protection agencies.

The Oakland Port Commission is currently developing a program to reform the broken port trucking system and is expected to vote on it in the coming months. In March, 2008, the Oakland Port Commission began the process of instituting a new trucking model to reduce diesel emissions by voting unanimously to levy fees on containers passing through the Port. The fees are expected to generate \$520 million and will be used to mitigate air pollution by retrofitting and replacing dirty trucks. The Commission directed Port staff to hire a consultant to conduct an Economic Impact Study on making drivers employees of the trucking companies. However, the Port Commission, failed to include any language that addresses how to institute an effective local hire program. Questions also remain as to how much of the old dirty truck fleet will be replaced through the container fees and how much of the costs of truck replacement, upgrades and maintenance will be shouldered by low-wage truck drivers.

The Coalition for Clean & Safe Ports, which includes the Interfaith Committee Worker Justice, supports a comprehensive Clean Trucks Program would:

- Require all port trucking firms to enter into concession agreements that incorporate environmental, community and labor standards;
- Make the industry responsible for clean trucks;
- Keep trucks off residential streets;
- End independent contracting and hire drivers as employees so they can organize for better working conditions;
- Provide good jobs to local residents; and
- Provide assistance to small, local trucking companies.

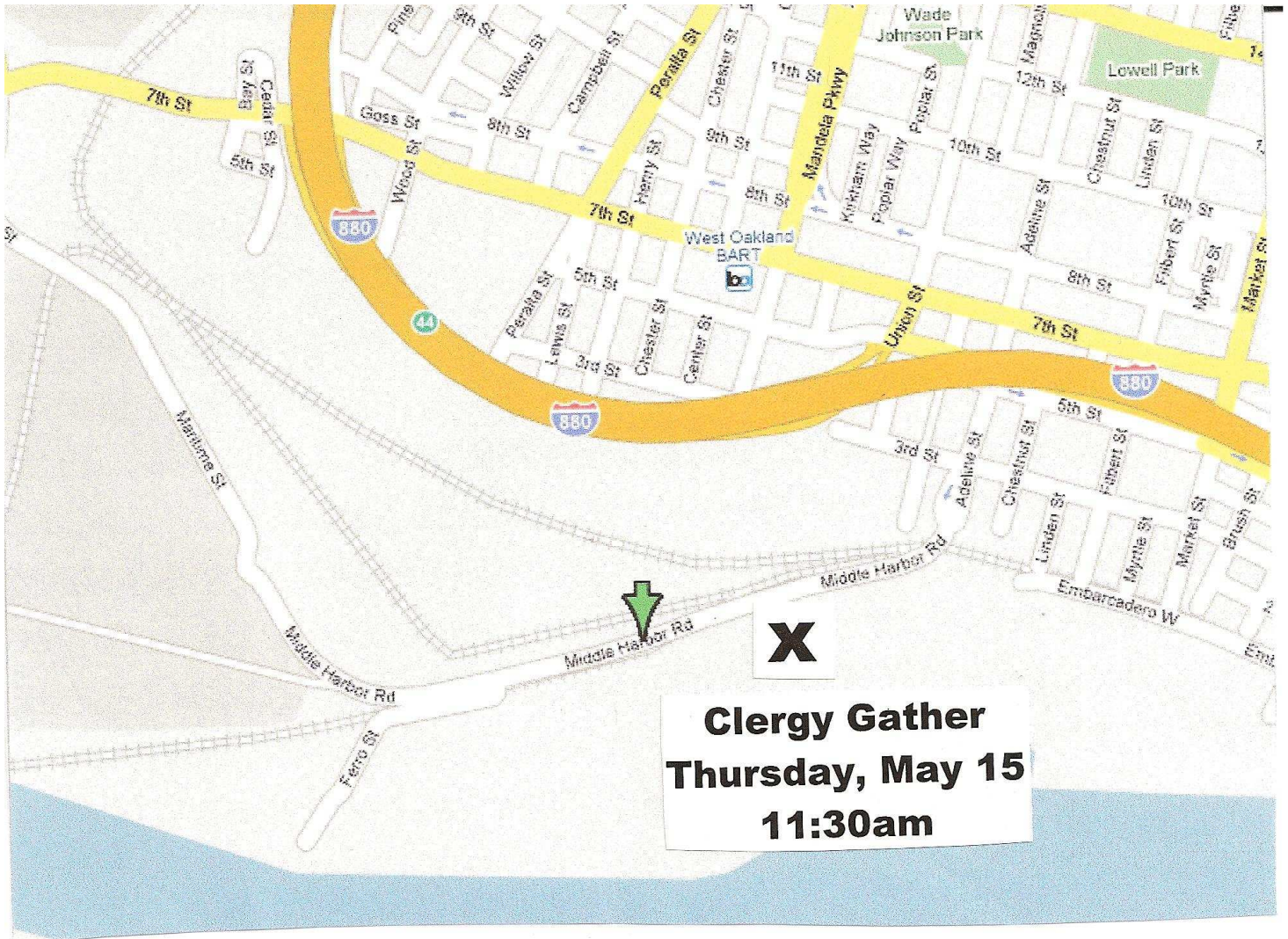
In March, 2008, the Los Angeles Harbor Commission voted unanimously to approve a comprehensive and sustainable Clean Trucks Program that requires the trucking industry to buy and maintain a clean-technology fleet and to employ truck drivers who currently operate as "independent contractors." The Los Angeles program serves as a model for how all West Coast Ports can operate sustainably.

For more information: www.oakland.cleanandsafeports.org

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The Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice (ICWJ) is at the forefront of building a dynamic, faith-rooted movement for economic justice in the East Bay. It is a network of people of faith—pastors, rabbis, lay ministers, seminarians and spiritual leaders—who support low wage and immigrant workers who are organizing for justice and pursuing policies that will sustain lives with dignity for workers and their families. ICWJ is an affiliate of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, a statewide organization that aims to end low-wage poverty in California by empowering workers and engaging clergy and congregations in campaigns of solidarity. The ICWJ is a project of the East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy, a visionary non-profit that does policy, organizing, research, and coalition building between faith communities, community groups, and labor unions in order to collectively confront the crisis of working poverty.

The Coalition for Clean & Safe Ports is an alliance of environmental, labor, faith, and community organizations promoting sustainable economic development at West Coast ports. The Coalition is working to reform the port trucking industry, reduce environmentally harmful port emissions, and stimulate greater economic opportunities for surrounding port communities. To ensure a level playing field, the Coalition is organizing at the Ports of Oakland, Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Seattle, so that standards are lifted regionally and no one port is put at a competitive disadvantage.



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Clergy Gather
Thursday, May 15
11:30am