

Starting a Green Team and Keeping it Going

By Mike McCord

They go by many names: green team, stewardship council, environmental task force, sustainability group, eco-group, or Creation care team are just a few of the names used. The purpose of the team is to bind care of Creation to the heart of your congregational life together. Here are a few tips:

1. Determine how your team fits into the congregation's organizational structure.

This will vary for each faith community. Larger congregations may have a committee for social concerns and form a subcommittee to be the Green Team. Smaller congregations may choose to have their Green Team be an independent committee. Some have reported the best success by receiving formal approval from the governing body of their congregation and by collaborating with other committees.

It is important to inform/involve the ministerial leadership/staff of your interest and commitment. The Green Team must be spiritually based and have the support of the leadership of the church. Without this, the long-term success of the Green Team is problematic. Meet personally with your senior minister early on the planning process to solicit his or her ideas regarding the team.

2. Create the team.

Gather a small group of people (five to ten) to serve and become familiar with the EarthCare Program. The EarthCare Program is a step by step process to assist ministries in integrating an earth-oriented spirituality into their faith community. EarthCare helps each congregation discover what Spirit calls them to do to care for our Earth home.

Make sure your team is well-rounded. In addition to having someone on the team with good communications skills, if possible include someone with basic math and computer skills (for helping to calculate energy savings and carbon footprint reductions), perhaps someone who is good with finances, another that knows a bit about raising money, and a people person who can rally some volunteers to your cause.

Finding members for your team. Here are a few ideas that others have found useful:

- ◆ Ask a faith leader to join the team or that one be appointed to serve as a liaison to the senior ministry and governing board.
- ◆ Show a movie on climate change or care for Creation to your congregation. Following the film, give a short talk about your team and invite others at the screening to join you.
- ◆ Make an oral announcement during your worship service inviting interested people to sign up for the team and attend a meeting to learn more about it or assist in its organization.
- ◆ Post a flyer, or put a similar announcement in your congregation's weekly bulletin or email.
- ◆ Have each of your present team members invite one other person to your next meeting. If you shape your team with care, it will be strong and will endure.

3. Think About Your Goals

After you have found or formed your team, sit down together to reflect on why your congregation would like to become a Certified EarthCare Congregation. This may include reflecting on Personal Motivations and your personal motivations and passions regarding caring for the environment and wanting to help your faith community become an EarthCare Congregation. Share your thoughts with others on the team, and get their reaction and thoughts. See Visioning meditation, personal discernment exercise and group share document).

4. Establish an organizational structure.

This can be as simple or complicated as you want but should include the basic organizational and operating structure of the team. This may include the maximum number of members, quorum requirements, officer positions and meeting frequency.

5. Action Plan

An action plan is a document that lists what steps must be taken in order to achieve the team's vision, goals and activities. It should include:

- Adoption of a Covenant of EarthCare
- Vision Statement and/or a mission Statement.
- Objectives.
- Goals.
- Strategies.

The plan clarifies the resources required to reach the goal, formulate a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed and determine what resources are required for the Green Team to succeed. An action plan has three major elements (1) Specific tasks: what will be done and by whom. (2) Time horizon: when will it be done. (3) Resource allocation: what specific funds are available for specific activities.

6. Covenant.

A covenant is a sacred trust between the church community and Spirit. It is a general expression of conscious awareness of our oneness with creation and a commitment to care for the Earth as a significant component of the ministry. Writing a covenant helps develop a vision for the ministry's care of creation and an intention to take actions that express the vision. It should be adopted by the governing board and congregation. Here is a sample:

Unity EarthCare Ministry Team 2008

Our consciousness reveals that all of creation is connected as one. The story of creation reveals that we are to be good caregivers of the creation. As a people of faith, we commit to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of all existence.

We honor our spiritual commitment to the care, support and defense of the balance between our individual needs and those of nature. We envision a world in which everything has intrinsic value and where all beings are assured a secure and meaningful life that is ecologically responsible and sustainable.

We agree to transform our individual and congregational lives into acts of moral witness, discarding harmful habits for new behaviors that demonstrate our respect for this harmony and interconnectedness.

We declare our covenant with God to walk upon the Earth for the greatest good of all creation.

7. Vision and Mission Statements

Following adoption of the covenant, there will be a progressive flow of inspiration, guidance and ideas from a vision and/or mission statement to an action plan. Each of which is more specific than the one before.

Vision Statement

A vision statement is a clear and inspirational one sentence description of the long-term desired change resulting from the covenant. It is an affirmation that sets the direction for future planning. Here are two examples:

Unity EarthCare Team

- All humanity lives in a spiritual consciousness that manifests as loving co-existence with all creation and care for our Earth home.

Unity Church of Overland Park, KS

- To promote stewardship of the environment and an awareness of our oneness with the earth.

Mission Statement

Mission statements succinctly summarize the purpose, objectives and goals of the EarthCare program. Sometimes they include or refer to the denomination's statement on climate or care of Creation, if it has one. Be sure to pass your green team's mission statement by the powers that be in your congregations for feedback and to get the buy-in you need to move forward with your projects. The goal of green teams is to green every decision made at congregation. Here are two examples:

Unity EarthCare Team:

- To foster awareness of our spiritual oneness with the Earth and to promote active care of all creation.

Unity Centre of Kitchener, Ontario

- We are committed to learning, loving and living in harmony with our Self, one another and the earth.

8. Other suggestions:

- It may be helpful to adopt specific "Areas of Interest" with an accompanying action plan for each. The Path to EarthCare contains a number of topics and action areas. In addition, there are numerous specific actions taken by other congregations for each step and action of the Path. It is entitled, "EarthCare Steps and Actions, Suggestions/Opportunities." Here are a few examples:

- Sustainable Living (i.e., recycling, energy conservation, reduce/reuse).
 - Education/Communication. (This is key to teaching the importance of stewardship of the environment. Whether within the congregational committee or in the wider community, share information, recruit participation & gather resources to carry out actions.)
 - Buildings and Grounds. Studies have shown that congregations that adopt energy efficiency and sustainable operational policies reduce operating costs an average of 33%.
 - Natural Resources. One of the greatest satisfactions of life is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth. In so doing we practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources.
 - Interdependent Web of Creation. Activities that represent a renewed reverence and respect for all forms of life as well as the interdependent web of creation.
- Work with the appropriate committees and individuals to carry out the Action Plan.
 - Promote among the members your identity as a congregation that cares for creation.
 - Meet regularly (monthly recommended) to follow the Action Plan and to develop new projects. Keep minutes of each meeting and send them to the entire group, as well as to the liaison person to the ministerial team & staff. Use the minutes to create an agenda for the next meeting and send it ahead of time. These things are essential help keep everyone focused on where you are and where you are going.
 - Pick the “low-lying fruit first.” By making your activities part of events planned by other environmental organizations it is much easier to achieve some quick successes that stimulate interest and enthusiasm for the concept of earth care).
 - As the success of the committee grows, be bold by branching out to take on congregational project that benefit the larger community.
 - Continue to develop new activities that are equally balanced between nurturing a spiritual commitment to the earth and achieving practical “on the ground” results.
 - Apply to be certified as an EarthCare Congregation and request that the church's governing board adopt the Green Congregation Mission Statement.
 - Be sure to offer regular updates on your team’s activity to your faith leaders, the governing board, and other committees by reporting in person or placing written updates in your congregation’s newsletter, bulletins and website.
 - Take the time to get your Green Team established as a regular part of your congregation’s life. It will pay off later in wider involvement by the community in your Cool Congregations program. You may even want to ask your faith leader to “commission” your team as a part of a worship service.
 - **Lastly, one thing is essential to all successful Green Teams. At least one person must be fully committed to keeping it going month after month after month, through thick and thin. This often means that person has to do the bulk, if not all of the work occasionally. Hopefully this will change over time but the truth of the matter is that while many people have an initial burst of enthusiasm, in many cases it fades after a while or they have a change in personal circumstances. But you mustn’t give up! “The Power of One” is mighty! He or she must be the keeper of the flame! I’m speaking from experience after maintaining a Green Team for 17 years at my church. Mike McCord**