



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION

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Green Sanctuary Program

Guidelines for Creating an Effective Green
Sanctuary Plan

These guidelines cover several key activity areas, each designed to help your congregation devise a challenging, rewarding action plan rooted in Environmental Justice, Worship and Celebration, Religious Education, and Sustainable Living.

Environmental Justice Projects

What is Environmental Justice?

Environmental justice is lacking wherever a group of people's health and/or well-being is threatened by the results of climate change or the economic systems causing it. By virtue of our existence, we use natural resources and cause pollution. Our choices connect us to a global web of consumption and production, inextricably tying our fate to that of our brothers' and sisters' upstream, downstream, and around the world.

There are several principles of environmental justice:

- All people have the right to equitably benefit from the extraction and use of natural resources, environmental "goods and services", and economic life. As Unitarian Universalists (UUs), we are called to work for a sustainable world for everyone, not just those who can afford it.
- We are called to live as consciously, justly, and thoughtfully as we can; we think deeply about the impacts of our decisions, and how to minimize our environmental "footprint" as individuals and nations.
- This means that we are called to address systemic discrimination and injustice in the risks and harms certain groups of people face related to the burdens of natural resource extraction, pollution, the siting of waste, transportation, military facilities, workplace hazards, expropriation of land, etc.
- We are also called to prevent future inequities by promoting the development and enforcement of appropriate laws and policies.
- Future generations have the right to at least as much access to and enjoyment of natural resources, environmental "goods and services", health and well-being as we do now.

What is an Environmental Justice Project?

- A congregational activity promoting environmental justice and conducted in solidarity with one of the communities affected by climate change.
- Intentional work that shifts us from "charity to solidarity": thinking and partnering with negatively impacted communities instead of providing short-term assistance.

Environmental justice is working to restore equity and balance that has been damaged by those parts of human society that depend on domination of others and on the extraction of resources without regard to the impact on the rest of the beings on our

planet. We have created three project categories to clarify and distinguish key elements of environmental justice.

1. **Species Equity:** restoring habitat of non-human species through conservation projects.
2. **Equity amongst Humans:** partnering with communities who bear the economic and health costs of environmental degradation to create projects that mitigate these effects.
3. **Inter-Generational Equity:** projects that make it possible for future generations to live more sustainably, such as the creation of new policies, laws or institutions.

Any project may incorporate more than one type. Examples are provided for illustrative purposes.

Species Equity: *Honoring the integrity and inherent worth of all beings, and preserving and protecting the ecosystems of which they are a part.*

Restoration and conservation projects have two requirements:

1. The conservation area must be a public space open to all and/or must be of cultural or social significance to people who have traditionally faced discrimination, marginalization or economic hardship.
2. Planning and implementation must be done in partnership with appropriate local groups, including those representing people who traditionally faced discrimination, marginalization or economic hardship.

Equity amongst Humans: (As individuals, communities, and nations) Bearing the risks and burdens of natural resource depletion, pollution, and economic development, including the enforcement of laws related to this.

Inter-Generational Equity: *Conserving, preserving, and restoring natural resources, ecosystems, and environmental “goods and services” such that future generations have as least as much access and enjoyment as we do now. This represents a commitment to sustainability in all its fullness.*

Projects in this category must contain one or both of the following aspects:

- Nurturing and supporting youth and young adult leadership related to environmental justice issues.
- Establishing a law, policy, or institution that will have long-term, lasting environmental justice benefits for future generations.

Project examples:

- A congregation helps create a coalition that is putting together a mixed used land trust to stimulate and protect small, locally-owned businesses and low to moderate income residences (e.g. Albuquerque, NM’s Sawmill Community Land trust).
- A congregation offers volunteers and computer expertise to local hunger groups, farmers, and community gardeners to map the local foodshed. They are part of a team that protects the local foodshed from development pressures by monitoring

- zoning and other legislative measures, reporting to local officials and the media as needed.
- A congregation teams with a nearby college campus ministry to establish a local UU young adult climate justice group affiliated with UU Ministry for Earth's national network. A large crowd gathers to support their first public action.
 - A congregation partners with other congregations and environmental groups to plan and implement a legislative advocacy campaign. They lobby the city council to pass an ambitious timetable as part of a renewable energy portfolio, moving the local government and power company towards a transition to renewable energy.

How Do We Create an Environmental Justice Project?

We have created a specific assessment process that will offer information about your congregation and the wider community. This will enable you to choose a focus that is a natural extension of things your congregation is already doing. As you will see, the key is to form a working relationship with a community adversely affected by an environmental crisis in your chosen area. The recommended training and exploration will serve you in creating this relationship, and designing your Environmental Justice Project.

Activities for each phase must be detailed in different portions of your Green Sanctuary Action Plan. See the review at the end of this document for details.

PHASE 1: REVIEW

Review all the congregation's active justice ministries and determine how they connect with your environmental justice/sustainability goals. This will help your team discover where seeds of multicultural partnerships exist. (Must submit review with your GS Action Plan.)

PHASE 2: INVESTIGATE

Complete an environmental justice analysis. We suggest using the UU Ministry for Earth curriculum "Our Place in the Web of Life". This curriculum will help your congregation understand how environmental injustice functions in your community.

Consider doing this early in the GS process, involving as much of your team and congregational leadership as possible. (Must submit analysis with your GS Action Plan.)

If you prefer not to use the UUMFE curriculum, you may conduct an environmental justice analysis of your community, noting connections with national and global issues. This could be done as a series of environmental justice tours, conversations, or meetings in various neighborhoods. (Must submit analysis with your GS Action Plan.)

PHASE 3: CONDUCT

- Analyze the impact of your congregation's building (policies, operations, programs) with an environmental justice lens. Be sure to consider local, national,

and international implications. (Must submit with your Congregational Policy and Program Audit.)

PHASE 4: CONSULT

- Consult with your congregation and congregational leaders to share findings of Phases 1, 2, and 3.
- Collectively, determine how your congregation will move forward in crafting **one** environmental justice project. (Must explain process in GS Candidacy Application.)

Worship and Celebration Projects

Projects in this area focus on big questions:

- What about the Unitarian Universalist (UU) faith calls us to respond to environmental crisis?
- How can UU worship and celebration ground and sustain UUs in this ministry?
- How can our UU practices build our capacity to be good partners in a diverse world?

WHAT IS A WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION PROJECT?

Projects in this area focus on big questions:

- What about the Unitarian Universalist (UU) faith calls us to respond to environmental crisis?
- How can UU worship and celebration ground and sustain UUs in this ministry?
- How can our UU practices build our capacity to be good partners in a diverse world?

EXAMPLES OF WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION PROJECTS:

There are many ways to deepen our connections to the natural world through worship and celebration. You'll need at least **three projects** that integrate environmental awareness into the spiritual life of the congregation. At least one should focus on environmental justice, and at least one should continue in the life of the congregation for the foreseeable future.

For example:

- Choose or develop prayers, meditations, readings, and sermons that integrate Earth awareness and deepen understanding, empathy, and commitment to people of differing experiences and cultures.
- Add a statement on caring for Earth to the opening words or chalice lighting used on Sunday mornings.

- Commission a song that celebrates the Earth for the congregation to sing during worship services.
- In small groups, share how being a Unitarian Universalist affects participants' relationship to the environment and environmental justice. Share how deepening those relationships affects what it means to be UU.
- Plan services or celebrations around special days or themes that recognize our relationship with the natural world, such as Earth Day, flower communion, or a water communion.
- Plan and carry out seasonal celebrations and rituals that deepen and enrich the congregation's relationship with the Earth (solstice service, harvest celebration).
- Learn and experience seasonal cycles with people of different cultures, noting the impacts of marginalization, environmental degradation, and human oppression. Ground the experience in what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist.
- Develop a class called "Gardening as Spiritual Practice," beginning with weeding as meditation and ending with an organic communion.
- Create a "green altar" honoring the sacredness of the natural world, and human connection to it.
- Provide spiritual events such as an outdoor worship service, "mindful hike," or camping trip.
- Create meditation zones or a labyrinth on your congregation's property.

Religious Education Projects

Religious Education (RE) shapes minds, attitudes, and practices. RE programs can bring children, youth, and adults to a deeper appreciation of the complexities of Earth's systems, multi-faith and community collaboration for environmental justice, and the sacredness of all life. They can also provide an understanding of how experiencing and caring for the natural world relates to our spiritual development and Unitarian Universalist faith.

WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROJECT?

Religious Education Projects can range from ongoing studies for adults or children to one-time experiences like forums and field trips. UUs who have made large contributions to the environmental movement might provide educational experiences. There are also events and causes in the wider world that would educate your congregation about what is happening to our planet and how to get involved.

In your action plan, include at least one RE Project for children and/or youth, and one for adults. Consider multigenerational activities that allow children, youth, and adults to reinforce each other's learning and have fun together. An intergenerational activity counts as one project, but it can satisfy the requirement for an adult project, **or** one for children and youth.

EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION ACTIVITIES

- Classroom learning: curriculum and/or lessons crafted for children or adults.
- Direct experience of nature
- Field trips to learn and participate in multicultural projects for environmental justice.
- Hands-on projects focused on caring for the environment.
- Educational films or lectures.

EXAMPLES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROJECTS

- Create environmentally themed sessions for your small group ministry program.
- Plan a celebration with a “green” theme, featuring locally and sustainably grown foods.
- Create a rotating display of artwork highlighting culturally different experiences of nature, relationship to the environment, and one another.
- Adopt an Earth-centered curriculum for the children’s RE program, teaching that we are all a part of nature, not separate and outside of it.
- Invite each class of children to adopt a small section of the congregation’s property. Encourage them to become familiar with its seasonal cycles and to learn about its inhabitants, from plants and animals to soil microbes and fungi.
- After children have learned about the ecosystem of an area, have them lead adults on a guided nature walk.
- Design an intergenerational project to learn about your local landscape’s biological and cultural history and any dangers that threaten it.
- Offer at least one Northwest Earth Institute discussion course each semester for adults and youth.
- Start an ongoing discussion group on voluntary simplicity.
- Hold a series of classes to study global warming or another environmental issue.
- Develop an adult course on eco-spirituality.
- Sponsor a community film festival of environmental films.
- Organize a book group focused on environmental topics.
- Collaborate with other congregations or environmental groups to design an educational series on an issue of significance in your area. Follow up with action to respond to what you learned.
- Invite local experts on environmental issues to give presentations or hold a panel discussion.
- Organize an intergenerational field trip - a visit to a bird sanctuary, for example.

- Teach children and adults to plant and care for a garden.
- Offer a workshop on canning and/or freezing fruits and vegetables from the garden.
- Hold an “Eat Your Values” food event, including workshops, educational materials, and cooking classes that promote locally grown, organic, and fair trade food choices.
- Organize a summer day camp with an environmental theme.

Sustainable Living Projects

This is an opportunity to reduce your congregation’s environmental footprint, lightening the burden on Earth’s systems. Select at least four projects in this area, including at least one aimed at energy conservation. Other possible target areas include landscaping, building management, waste management, water conservation, and transportation.

WHAT IS A SUSTAINABLE LIVING PROJECT?

Projects in this area focus on the following questions:

- What can UUs do as individuals, households, and at the institutional level to live more sustainably?
- How does our individual, household, and collective way of life impact marginalized people and the environment?
- How do we know that the actions we take make a difference? What have we learned that can help us in the next effort?
- What do we need to know about how the way we live impacts communities we may only be marginally aware of? How, then, shall we live?

EXAMPLES OF SUSTAINABLE LIVING PROJECTS

Projects focused on congregational practices often require developing or modifying relevant policies (including building rental agreements, where appropriate). To ensure that policy changes are actually carried out in practice, consider a publicity campaign. For example, if you adopt a recycling policy, children and youth could create colorful posters reminding individuals to place recyclables in designated containers.

Some projects may encourage congregants to change their daily habits at home and elsewhere. Document the changes people make and calculate the collective benefits to illustrate how individual actions can make a big difference.

Possible Projects

- Implement some recommendations from your energy audit to reduce energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions.

- Start a program for recycling and/or composting waste.
- Establish a composting “buddy system”: those who don’t have a compost pile can give their vegetable waste to those who do.
- Form an energy task force to make suggestions on reducing energy and water use.
- Develop and implement policies for purchasing recycled products and/or using environmentally friendly cleaning products.
- Encourage congregants to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in their personal lives, perhaps by making a pledge to take specific actions.
- Ask for individual commitments to reduce energy consumption at home. Use an online tool to calculate cumulative savings for the congregation.
- Suggest changes in dietary habits to become more sustainable, using the UUA’s Ethical Eating Guide.
- Commit to including vegetarian and/or local foods in community potlucks.
- Design a program to encourage the use of alternative transportation (carpooling, bicycling).
- Develop policies directing congregational investments into socially and environmentally responsible funds.
- If you serve meals at your facility, take steps to make them Zero Trash events. One congregation raised funds to buy additional dishes to replace paper plates and received a grant to hire a neighborhood resident to help wash dishes.
- Promote a “Bring Your Own Plates” campaign for congregational potlucks.
- Create a Green Campaign Fund to be spent only on projects that reduce the congregation’s carbon footprint.
- Redesign your property’s landscaping using xeriscape techniques (native and drought-tolerant plants) to reduce water usage.
- Install a photovoltaic solar panel.
- Arrange for the facility to receive 100% of its energy from clean sources, and encourage families in the congregation to do the same.

Involving the Congregation

Engaging congregants in developing the action plan can help you obtain buy-in for the Green Sanctuary program. Green Sanctuary Teams have had success inviting congregants to suggest project ideas, offer opinions about proposals, or agreeing to commit to the completed plan before submission.

Responses to the Environmental Justice Assessment can suggest projects that would be of interest to a large number of congregants. Using this tool also ensures greater clarity about the project(s), and can increase participation and commitment.

BRAINSTORMING PROJECT IDEAS

- Completing your congregational and justice assessments can identify gaps, problems, and opportunities for further action in each of the four focus areas. Any of these could suggest potential projects (this can include the environmental justice impact of congregational practices).
- Identify congregational issues and projects that generate passion and curiosity.
- Ask if there are ways to expand or deepen ongoing congregational programs by adding an environmental dimension. For example, if you already have an active program on affordable housing, you might decide to integrate an energy efficiency component.
- Review the goals and objectives of your congregation's long-range strategic plan. You may be able to adapt some of these to include Green Sanctuary goals.
- Analyze current events, including local, regional, or global news. This may expose an environmental issue that could inspire a Green Sanctuary project.

There are more suggestions at the end of this section, many based on successful Green Sanctuary programs.

ASSESSING YOUR RESOURCES

There are great gifts and resources within your congregation, but it is important to create realistic goals for what you hope to accomplish.

Discussing resource availability in the early stages makes it easier to plan a successful program. Your team may decide that a project is impractical as originally conceived, but could be feasible if shared, refocused, or scaled to a more manageable scope. When you think creatively about your resources - including partnerships with other community groups - you may find that a daunting project is actually within reach. Seek to design a realistic action plan that is ambitious enough to energize and inspire the congregation.

Here are some questions for your team:

- Given the current realities and demographics of your congregation, what might be reasonable steps and an approximate timeline for your project? How much time and energy would it take to carry this out?
- How can your congregants' skills contribute to the project(s) you are considering? What skills do you need? Could people learn on their own, or do

you need to bring in someone to help? Is there an organization outside the congregation (another UU congregation in the district, interfaith or community groups...) you could collaborate with?

- What tools and materials do groups or individuals have that might contribute to the project(s)? What others would be needed? How could you borrow or obtain them?
- What are the costs? How could you raise funds? Are state or regional funds available?
- How might we share brainstorming, planning, leadership and participation with existing and diverse congregational groups? What would their role be?
- What experience have we had with similar projects? What did we learn?

MAKING EVERY PROJECT COUNT

Many congregations ask whether their action plan can include projects they have already completed. The answer is “sometimes.” Recent projects - especially if they led to your decision to seek accreditation, or were started while moving toward your involvement in the program - can be included in your action plan.

However, programs or policies that have been in place for a long time generally don't count as one of your action plan projects. That's because the Green Sanctuary program is designed to help you move forward to new levels of awareness and action.

Your projects won't solve the environmental crisis by themselves, but they will help raise awareness and encourage congregants to start or continue on the path. As a congregation, you will deepen your relationship with the Earth, each other, and communities beyond your congregation, creating resilience and a commitment to responding to environmental crises. That is why the projects incorporate religious and environmental education, spiritual practice, *and* environmental Sunday sermons.

Remember: this is lifetime work, not a two-year project to check off your to-do list before moving on to something else. Strive to create an action plan that moves the congregation toward transformation.

BALANCING PARTICIPATION

An effective Green Sanctuary action plan involves several types of projects. Different projects appeal to different people, and not every project will involve everyone. Policy development projects may involve members of the Green Sanctuary team and relevant decision makers. Classes or discussion groups may remain small, although participation is open to all. Still other activities, such as an annual Earth Day event, will involve a large portion of the congregation. Offering a range of opportunities increases the likelihood that everyone in the congregation will participate in one way or another.

Also consider the balance between active and passive projects. Passive projects might look like watching a film about an environmental issue, or writing a check for a good cause. An action plan with plenty of active, hands-on projects can get people energized, help them make a deeper connection, and offer a greater sense of accomplishment. Reaching out to the larger community across cultural boundaries to learn and

collaborate; planting a garden; organizing a community eco-fair; or installing insulation all call for active participation.

Look for ways to make your projects welcoming and accessible to people of different ages and abilities. For example: when planning a project that involves physical labor, offer alternatives such as doing research, gathering supplies, or making phone calls to organize volunteers.

TAKING A THEMATIC APPROACH

Some congregations select a theme that will serve as a framework for the action plan projects, and provide a unifying context for individual projects. Your theme might involve something that's already part of your congregation's identity: migrant worker support, ethical eating, or an active connection to the land on which the congregation is situated.