

What it Means to be a Green Church: Getting it Started and Keeping it Going

The idea for my church, Unity of Overland Park, Kansas, to become a Green Church sprang out of a Visioning process in late 2003 that had been organized to determine the future direction of the church. In a vote of areas considered most important to the participants, conservation and the environment placed second out of 15 issues. Taking this as a mandate, in February of 2004, I set out a sign-up sheet in our community room following Sunday services to see if anybody was interested in becoming a member of an environmental committee. Four people signed their names.

Using the model developed by the Unitarian Universalist Association's "Seventh Principle" project, we plunged head first into the unknown by drafting a document for that outlined the organizational structure, objectives, goals, and strategies of the committee. Our organizing document included the following:

1. Vision Statement.
2. Mission Statement.
3. Four "Areas of Interest" with an accompanying action plan to achieve results in each area within a specified time frame.
4. An organizational structure that included a facilitator, vice facilitator and secretary-treasurer. In addition, it called for the establishment of a line item in the budget and that a liaison staff person be appointed to serve as an intermediary between the committee and the church.

After the committee had agreed upon these issues, it was sent it to the Board of Directors for their approval. Following Board approval, we hit the ground running!

Our initial philosophy was to "pick the low hanging fruit" first in order to achieve some easy first successes that would build enthusiasm and support for the committee. Examples include participating in events already scheduled by other organizations such as "Earth Day Walk in the Zoo", which was sponsored by Bridging the Gap, a local non-profit group that was a leader in the environmental community. The idea worked, enabling the Green Team to take on increasingly difficult tasks as time went on.

Today, we have a membership of around 60 people and the breadth of our activities continues to grow. And along the way we've learned many things, both good and bad. Here are a few that I hope will help others successfully turn theirs into a "green" church, while avoiding some of our mistakes:

- While having a good organizational structure is vitally important, it's equally important that the Green Team be spiritually based and has the support of the leadership of the church. So along with obtaining approval by the board of directors, be sure that you have the active support of your senior minister. Without this, the long-term success of the environmental committee is problematic. Meet personally with your senior minister early on the planning process to solicit his or her ideas regarding the Green

Team. Incorporate them into the mission, objectives and goals of the Green Team as much as possible. In addition, adopt a declaration or covenant of earth care that sets out the church's commitment to be good stewards of the environment. Its adoption should be recognized and celebrated by the entire congregation.

- **Meet regularly (at least monthly) to follow the Action Plan and develop new projects.**
- **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.**
- **Diversify the committee's leadership as much as possible. While every Green Team needs at least one "champion" (i.e., someone who's dedicated to its success and will do whatever's necessary when no one else steps forward), more than one person must be committed. The long-term success of the environmental committee can't be expected to ride upon one person's shoulders.**
- **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.**

A commitment to protecting and preserving the environment sends a powerful signal to the congregation regarding the church's commitment to environmental stewardship. Members will be proud to belong to a congregation that cares about our earth and has a commitment to protecting the environment. It may even spur them to do more in their own lives. Through leading by example, you have the opportunity to show others ways to live their lives in more spiritual harmony with the earth.

Mike McCord

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A GREEN CHURCH: GETTING STARTED AND KEEPING IT GOING

—Mike McCord, Unity Church of Overland Park (Kansas, USA)

Unity Church of Overland Park is on its way to becoming a “Green Church.” In a “green church” the staff and congregation are committed to protecting and preserving our environment. Through leading by example, the church’s commitment spurs the members to do more in their own lives. Collectively we demonstrate ways to live our lives in spiritual harmony with the earth.

The idea for our church to become “green” sprang out of a church-wide visioning process in late 2003. Out of fifteen areas proposed, conservation of the environment placed second! Taking this as a mandate, in February of 2004 we formed our environmental committee. Our mailing list is now about 60 people and the breadth of our activities has continued to grow. Along the way we’ve learned many things. I hope the following ideas will help others successfully turn theirs into a “green” church:

- *It’s vital for the work to be spiritually based and have the support of the minister and Board of Directors. Start with prayer and create a vision with the minister and church leadership. Also consider adopting a covenant of EarthCare that states the congregation’s commitment to be good stewards of the environment. Its adoption should be recognized and celebrated by the entire congregation.*
- *Diversify the committee’s leadership as much as possible. While every Green Team needs at least one “champion” to keep the committee energized, more than one person must be committed to ensure long-term success.*
- *Identify areas of interest and create an Action Plan. Pick the “low-lying fruit” first. By participating in events planned by other organizations, you can achieve some quick successes that stimulate interest and enthusiasm for EarthCare.*
- *Balance your activities between nurturing a spiritual commitment to EarthCare and achieving practical “on the ground” results that benefit the church and larger community.*

We’ve used these ideas to guide our work at Unity of Overland Park. It may not be easy “being green,” but as we’ve found out, it’s rewarding!