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## EarthCare Commitment Program

In this program, the congregation and ministry leadership are invited to create a vision for EarthCare and then take actions that demonstrate a commitment to caring for creation.

Congregations may choose any three of the seven steps of the **Path to EarthCare** (see center of this leaflet) and identify actions for those steps that are appropriate for the ministry.

There are many easy ways to begin to care for creation. Some examples are:

- hold a special service for Earth Day Sunday
- include prayers for creation in each Sunday service
- recycle office paper
- replace/sell incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs
- minimize waste by using washable dinnerware for hospitality
- show a documentary film on an EarthCare topic
- hold a study group on sustainable living or voluntary simplicity
- participate in activities already planned by other organizations, such as local stream/neighborhood/park or roadway cleanup days, EPA's *Change a light, Change the World* campaign, or The Nature Conservancy's *Plant a Billion Trees* campaign.

Sample activities are listed for each of the Path steps in the next section and on the **Certification Checklist** (Form 4). Excellent websites and books, with more suggestions and resources, are listed in the **Bibliography of Suggested Resources** compiled by the EarthCare Team. The possibilities are limited only by your creativity!

Once a congregation decides to begin the Commitment program, they are invited to submit the **Notice of Intention** (Form 2) to the EarthCare Team. While this notification is voluntary, doing so allows the EarthCare Team to support congregations that are interested in EarthCare with email newsletters and networking opportunities.

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## EarthCare Congregation Certification

Some congregations may decide to complete the entire EarthCare Congregation Program as described in this leaflet and outlined in the **Certification Checklist** (Form 4), and then become certified as an *EarthCare Congregation*. The Congregation Program is a guide to active fulfillment of the ministry's vision for EarthCare.

Based on the **Path to EarthCare** (see center of this leaflet), the EarthCare Congregation Program is a comprehensive approach to an earth-oriented spirituality that touches the entire life of the ministry. The program is centered on cultivating a consciousness for EarthCare that includes both spiritual and practical actions. It is our experience that, by following this program, EarthCare can be integrated into the life of the ministry that is sustainable over time.

Sample activities are listed for each step of the Path. Excellent websites and books, with more suggestions and resources, are listed in the **Bibliography of Suggested Resources** compiled by the EarthCare Team.

### **Certification:**

Should a ministry wish to be recognized as an *EarthCare Congregation*, the ministry is requested to submit the **Notice of Intention** (Form 2) as they begin the program. This allows the EarthCare Team to provide support and resources to the ministry, including email newsletters and networking opportunities.

Upon completion of the program, the ministry should submit the **Notice of Completion** (Form 3) and **Certification Checklist** (Form 4), along with a brief description of the actions taken for each step of the path. All forms should be submitted to the EarthCare Team.

Upon receipt and review of the Notice of Completion and Checklist forms, the ministry will receive an **EarthCare Congregation Certificate of Completion** (see Form 5 for sample).

**Certified EarthCare Congregations** will be listed on the Association of Unity Churches International website. Certified congregations receive support and resources from the EarthCare Team, including email newsletters and networking opportunities. In return, the congregation may be asked to answer questions, provide information, or provide mentorship to new ministries interested in becoming EarthCare Congregations.



# Unity Churches International

## EarthCare Congregation Program



### Overview

The EarthCare Team, a ministry team of the Association of Unity Churches International, has designed the *EarthCare Congregation Program* to assist congregations in integrating an earth-oriented spirituality into their ministry.

The program consists of three components:

#### **EarthCare Covenant**

#### **EarthCare Commitment Program**

#### **EarthCare Congregation Certification**

Congregations may choose any of the three components. The components are designed with increasing levels of commitment and activities, from setting an intention with the Covenant, accomplishing some meaningful actions in the Commitment Program, to expressing EarthCare in all aspects of the ministry by becoming an EarthCare Congregation.

Regardless of the option chosen, it is important that the ministry leadership be included in discerning EarthCare actions that are appropriate for the ministry.

We welcome questions, suggestions, and feedback for improving the *EarthCare Congregation Program*. Please contact us at [earthcare@unity.org](mailto:earthcare@unity.org).

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## EarthCare Covenant

An EarthCare Covenant is a sacred trust between the congregation and Spirit. A covenant expresses a conscious awareness of our oneness with creation and a commitment by the congregation to care for the earth as a significant component of the ministry.

Congregations may choose to adopt the provided **EarthCare Covenant** (below and Form 1) or create their own. Writing their own covenant can be extremely meaningful for the congregation as they develop their vision for the work. We suggest the covenant be presented and signed at a ceremony involving the entire community, and posted in the ministry as a declaration of their sacred trust.

*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.*

After the Covenant has been approved, the **Notice of Intention** (Form 2) may be submitted to the EarthCare Team. While this notification is voluntary, doing so allows the EarthCare Team to support congregations that are interested in EarthCare with email newsletters and networking opportunities.

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## The Path to EarthCare<sup>1</sup>

A conscious strategy can help us achieve success in any undertaking. This seven-step Path is recommended because it recognizes spiritual commitment and visioning as essential parts of reaching our goals. It is anticipated that ministries pursuing a commitment to EarthCare would likely cycle through these steps many times as they proceed along their path.

### Pray

Our consciousness of God opens the way for ideas, inspiration, and guidance. To begin EarthCare in a ministry, first create a consciousness for the work through prayer. Prayer guides the ministry to its own unique expressions of caring for creation.

### Vision

Once a ministry discerns, through prayer, a call to adopt EarthCare, they should create a vision for the work with the ministry leadership. This may take the form of a vision statement, a mission statement or covenant to care for creation.

- A covenant is a sacred trust. It expresses the ministry's vision for care of creation and an intention to take actions that express the vision. It should be considered a pact between the congregation and Spirit.
- A vision statement is an affirmation that concentrates on the future, is a source of inspiration and provides clear decision making criteria. A vision statement sets the direction for future planning.
- A mission statement defines the purpose, critical processes and goals of the EarthCare program.

When developing a vision for EarthCare, the congregation may hold a prayerful dialogue by asking questions such as: "How do we perceive God?" "What is our relationship to God's creation?" "How can we be good stewards of Earth?"

We also encourage ministries to create a brief **Action Plan**. The action plan outlines the ways the leadership and congregation intend to express an earth care consciousness in the life of the ministry.

<sup>1</sup> Based on the "Path to Earth Care" developed in the Northwest Region of the Association of Unity Churches International, 2004, revised 2007.

## Take Action

To express loving care for the earth requires a commitment of time, energy, and money. The specific actions taken will depend on the needs and vision of the community. The activities may be simple or complex, contained solely within the ministry or reach out into the broader community.

### Energy/Environmental Audit

Conduct an audit of building, grounds, and operations to assist the ministry in becoming a better caregiver of the environment through environmental conservation. Contact local utilities for further information. Statistics show that faith organizations that adopt energy efficient practices save an average of 33% on their operational costs.

Through an audit, congregation members are encouraged to learn how personal lifestyle choices affect the environment and what alternative choices are available to minimize that impact. Ministry programs can expand to include EarthCare issues that members see as important to their faith, and demonstrate ways to live their lives in spiritual harmony with the environment. Members are proud to belong to a ministry that cares about our Earth and is committed to protecting the environment.

### Energy Conservation

Perhaps the single greatest human activity affecting global climate change is the production of carbon dioxide through the extensive use of fossil fuels. Reducing our rate of use of these traditional energy sources will conserve these resources, lower utility bills, and help preserve ecological systems as well as human cultures.

**TRY:** implement recommendations of energy audits to reduce heat and electric bills; sell CFL or LED light bulbs; promote car-pooling, walking/bicycling, or using public transit.

### Recycling

A recycling program or connecting with existing programs is an easy way for congregations to take meaningful environmental action on a limited budget.

**TRY:** recycle cans, bottles, newspaper, cardboard, magazines and junk mail; prepare a recycling guide for the congregation.

### Waste Minimization

Over-consumption contributes to pollution and to our landfills. What we purchase and consume are votes for those goods and services. Decisions to "reduce" and "reuse" are powerful spiritual statements of environmental responsibility, both for ourselves and the larger community.

**TRY:** use washable cups, plates, and utensils for Sunday hospitality; install low-flow toilets, a timer for the hot water heater; make thermostat adjustments.

We encourage EarthCare Congregations to express their vision and creativity by adopting sustainable lifestyle practices. The actions of the ministry can be a model and encourage individuals to make changes in their personal lives as well.

### Water Conservation and Landscaping

Water pollution is one of the leading consumption-related environmental problems facing the world today. **TRY:**

- Adopt a water budget.
- Catch storm drain runoff systems.
- Select new plantings that are native or other low-water plants.
- Practice "Grass Recycling."
- Limit the use of gas-powered mowers. Lawn maintenance contractors should be required to mow early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Set lawnmower blade one notch higher as longer grass means less evaporation.
- Water: make sure sprinklers do not water non-green areas; place a layer of mulch around plants and trees to reduce evaporation; water early in the morning or late in the day. More than half the water applied to lawns and gardens can be lost through evaporation or run-off because of overwatering.
- Use organic or natural lawn, shrub, and tree fertilizers.
- Harvest rainwater from drainpipes and install underground distribution lines to lawn areas.

### Stewardship of Natural Resources

One of the greatest satisfactions of life is to explore, enjoy, and care for natural spaces, both in our backyards and globally. Through these activities we promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources.

**TRY:** "adopt a spot" (park, neighborhood, street, highway, cemetery, beach, or trail); attend hikes and conservation work projects (such as tree planting and trail maintenance) sponsored by conservation organizations.

### Promote Awareness of the Interdependence of Creation

We are called to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of creation. Through an expansion and re-centering of our awareness to include the whole planetary ecosystem, we will come into deeper alignment with the oneness of the universe and guide the use of our collective culture for the common good.

**TRY:** promote food cooperatives to buy locally or organically grown food products; respond to climate change; advocate for a healthful human environment.

## Inspire

With inspiration, our prayers and vision begin to move into outer expression. Ministries can inspire care of the earth by including an earth focus in their activities, such as Sunday services, prayers, songs, and special ceremonies. The Truth that God is everywhere present in Creation then becomes alive in people's minds and hearts, and translates into daily action.

## Learn

It is important to gather information and resources to educate ourselves in preparation for future action. Further, sponsoring educational activities in our ministries opens a space for individuals--and the community--to explore, pray and discern greater understanding about complex environmental topics. Such experiences may bring into ministries the challenging issues of life on earth and create spiritual connection with them. Educating people to pray first and act upon guidance fosters unity and God-centered action. Obvious avenues for communication include the ministry newsletter, Sunday bulletin, and displays.

## Share

Sharing our ideas and successes, through word-of-mouth, presentations, and news media, is important for fostering the work within our congregations and the larger community. Networking with other groups and programs reminds us that we are not alone in the task of caring for creation. Unity ministries may network with local conservation groups, interfaith creation care centers, and spiritual centers of other denominations with creation care programs. As we become aware of the work within Unity and elsewhere, our common ground—Earth—becomes a sacred home for unity. By raising awareness of our common cause, we can unite our actions to care for humanity and the planet that sustains us.

## Renew

Every work has its seasons. There are ebbs and flows in EarthCare work. However, even during a "winter" season of low energy for projects, we can maintain sacred space for creation through Sunday services and special ceremonies. Prayer and visioning anew, perhaps annually, allows the ministry to re-assess where to focus its efforts.