

# **Congregational Assessment for UUCB**

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## **History**

Our congregation's interest in becoming a "Green Sanctuary" was spurred by Al Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth," sponsored by the UUCB Social Justice Committee in November of 2006. As a product of the subsequent discussion, the UUCB Environmental Task Force was formed, with the charge to develop a set of actionable proposals that would reduce our carbon footprint, as a building, as individuals and throughout the larger community. It was through the work of this committee that the recommendation that we pursue Green Sanctuary designation was born.

## **Energy Usage and Current Conservation Practices**

An Energy Audit was completed in February 2007. Congregants on the "Energy Audit Team", a subcommittee of the UUCB Environmental Task Force, did much of the work. Both electricity use and heat use/loss were evaluated. According to the yearly summary from our local power provider, NYSEG, we use 52,880 kilowatt-hours per year. That converts to approximately 35.43 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. For our heating needs, we consume 7,183 therms of natural gas per year, which converts to 40.94 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. We do not cool the building artificially, except for our church office, which uses a window unit as needed. Our total "Carbon Footprint" is therefore approximately 76 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year. Currently, we do not participate in our local power provider's renewable energy program that allows customers to buy wind power.

Our electricity usage is mainly for heating the addition (see below), lighting, computers, kitchen appliances and dehumidifiers. We are in the process of converting light fixtures to florescent bulbs wherever possible. We have eliminated the use of dimmer switches in order to make this possible. Most incandescent fixtures in high-use areas now have CFLs. The main exception is the floodlights in the sanctuary. CFLs may now be available that would be suitable replacements for them. We have four computers in use. Three of the four now have energy efficient flat-screen monitors and are turned off when not in use. The fourth computer does not have a flat screen monitor and is not turned off when not in use. Overall, our staff is conscientious about turning off lights and machines when not in use and keeping air conditioning use to a minimum.

Our gas hot water furnace is original to our building and therefore more than fifty years old. However it has been kept in good repair. It is cleaned and repaired before every heating season. It is estimated to be operating at about 75% efficiency. The portion of the building heated by the furnace is divided into 7 heating zones, each of which is controlled by a programmable thermostat. Electric resistance heats the building's large addition (rooms 6-9, 11 and 12). Each room in the addition also has a separate programmable thermostat. All thermostats are set based on typical use at various times of the day. In the winter, the low setting in the sanctuary is 55°F and in the rest of the building it is 60°F. The high setting in all areas is 70°F. Effective use of programmable

thermostats is one way our congregation already lessens our carbon footprint. An additional improvement would be to lower the programmed high setting by 2 or more degrees.

In evaluating conduction heat loss, the Energy Audit team determined the R-value of the walls, windows and roof throughout our physical space. Our building consists of an original space containing the sanctuary and some offices and meeting rooms, and then a large addition, consisting mostly of classrooms. The high, arched, 5,000 sq.ft. uninsulated roof of our sanctuary is our biggest liability in terms of heat loss. The walls in the original building also lack insulation. The R-value of the walls in the original building and the sanctuary roof is therefore low, at 3 to 4. In the addition, the R-values are higher; the insulated walls are rated at 9.5. The ceilings throughout the structure, excepting the sanctuary, are insulated and rate well at 17.5. Windows throughout our physical space are problematic: sanctuary windows are double-paned and others have storms but, overall, the windows rate low, at about 2. An outside contractor also evaluated heat loss through blower door and infrared camera measurements. His results indicated that our building was not suffering from heat loss due to air infiltration but rather the previously stated issues of insulation deficits.

The Energy Audit Team made a number of recommendations based on its findings. The majority of these have not been acted on because of cost and the ongoing discussion as to whether we will stay in our existing space or relocate.

### **Food**

While we do not have any policies regarding food served by UUCB per se, in practice, we plan meals to include vegetarian and often vegan offerings. This is a cultural practice that has developed over the years in response to the varied philosophies and health needs of our congregation. It is becoming more common for local and organic foods to be offered, but there are no policies in place. Likewise, there are no policies that limit sweets or other nutritionally deficient foods but, in addition to the bagels and Danish, there are often fruit or whole-grain choices at Sunday morning coffee hours.

About five years ago, the UUCB Social Justice Committee introduced the sale of Equal Exchange coffee to support the work of small farmers around the world. UUCB began using the fair trade coffee exclusively for Sunday Coffee Hours not long after that.

### **Transportation**

Although we have no programs in place to encourage alternatives to driving, we have a number of congregants who routinely walk or ride bikes to services. We are located in a residential area that has sidewalks and is on several bus routes, so alternatives to driving are available to congregants. Additionally, there are a number of congregants who carpool in order to accommodate fellow congregants who do not own cars.

### **Water Use**

We do not have water-saving devices in place; however, water is not a resource in short supply in our area. We do limit watering of our landscaping (see Landscaping, below).

**Disposal of Materials**

Local (Broome County) recycling procedures mandate the recycling of paper, plastic and metal. Recycling bins are provided in several locations, including the kitchen, preschool classrooms, and offices. Compliance by congregants appears to be high and consistent. A number of groups rent our facility, and consistency by these groups is sometimes less, as individuals may reside in other counties that do not practice the high level of recycling that ours does. The practice of our current custodial staff is to remove misplaced recyclable material from the trash bins when possible and consolidate trash between partially filled bags when odor is not an issue.

We do not currently have a composting program in place. However, it is on the agenda of the Sustainability Project Area Group.

During construction or maintenance, the Property Committee recycles materials, when applicable, by recycling curbside or bringing building materials to the county landfill's Reclamation Center.

**Non-disposable Materials**

One of our resources is a full kitchen with adequate tableware for most sized functions. Reusables are customary for the Sunday Coffee Hours. There is no policy in place mandating using this reusable ware or limiting paper-ware to recycled content. There is an effort by those congregants who are responsible for the Sunday Coffee Hours to limit the use of disposables. Dishwashing powder and liquid are by Shaklee, a company known for its green products. Some groups, both internal and those who rent building space, do opt for disposable paper or plastic-ware for their functions.

**Purchasing**

Office Supplies – Our biweekly newsletter is available electronically. Copies sent out to congregants are printed on recycled paper. Approximately 50% of other paper products purchased are 30% post-consumer content.

Paper towels, paper napkins, toilet tissue – According to our supplier, all meet EPA standards and contain post consumer paper.

**Maintenance of the Building**

Our custodial staff for the past several years has made intentional efforts to clean our building using the most environmentally friendly products possible. "Thieves Young Living Essential Oil" is used for the majority of the cleaning tasks, including mopping of floors and the cleaning of surfaces and bathroom fixtures. "Glade Air Fresheners" are used in the bathrooms to control odor. Conventional cleaners, such as "Windex" and "Zap", are used for windows and in the carpet cleaner.

We have a contract with a local pest control company that comes in several times a year to control ants and other pests. It is our assumption that they employ toxic chemicals for these purposes.

### **Landscaping and Grounds Care**

We have a contract with a local company to mow the lawn, collect the fall leaves and plow the snow. It is our understanding that they employ standard practices typical for their field. Congregants care for the gardens surrounding our building. They intentionally do not use pesticides or herbicides. Small amounts of conventional fertilizer are used in preparing soil for new plantings. There is an intentional effort to choose plants that do not require watering, with the long-range goal being that very limited watering will be necessary. Currently, water that is required comes from the tap, or to a lesser degree, rainwater from the downspouts. Yard waste from gardening is put to the curb for pickup to be composted at the Broome County Landfill, composted informally by placing under bushes, or added to a small brush pile on site.

### **Investing**

The UUCB has an Endowment Fund. The investment counselor is directed to invest the funds in a manner that reflects the ethical and social conscience of our congregation. The Endowment committee will be meeting soon with their investment counselor to better understand how the funds are currently invested.

### **Social Justice**

The Social Justice Committee presented “An Inconvenient Truth” in November 2006, kick-starting our Congregation’s drive to become green. This presentation was very well attended, with our Sanctuary filled to overflowing. More recent projects have centered on health care for all, peace and legislative issues. The Social Action Committee also sells Equal Exchange coffee, teas, cocoa and chocolate bars weekly during Coffee Hour in order to support the work of small farmers around the world. Estimates for gross revenue are \$4,000 a year. There are a number of congregants who routinely buy their coffee and tea products through this service.

### **Religious Education**

The UUCB has a long history of an active Religious Education program for its youth. Prior to 2007, the Religious Education program used a four-year cycle of themes, one of which was “UU Identity and History”. During this cycle, lessons focused on the UU Principles. The 7<sup>th</sup> principle that addresses our place in the web of life was taught through a variety of lessons. Another one of the themes in the four-year cycle was “World Religions” for which lessons on Paganism was included. Additionally, the students celebrated Earth Day every year through a variety of earth-awareness lessons and May Day by dancing around the May Pole.

Within the last 2 years, there has been a growing sensitivity on the part of the Religious Education Committee that environmental issues are a topic of concern in the congregation and community at large. Consequently, our “Jumping January” Intergenerational Workshops in 2007 included a drumming workshop and a panel presentation of Paganism. “Jumping January 2008” had an entirely environmental theme, offering eleven different workshops, ranging from the hands-on “Art from Trash” to EcoTheater, which culminated in a presentation of Dr. Seuss’s classic environmental

warning tale, “The Lorax”. Through “Spirit Play” for ages 5 to 9, youngsters have heard Grandfather’s Prayers for the Earth and other stories that teach respect and honor for the natural world. Our “Coming of Age” program for young people, bridging from childhood to adolescence, connects each teen with an adult sponsor to discuss belief systems. One topic they address is the youths’ beliefs relative to their place in the world and the universe. The teens and their sponsors also canoed down the Susquehanna River, took a walk on a congregant’s sheep farm, and explored Hiawatha Island, a local natural area.

In April 2007, the youth group sponsored a t-shirt sale and hosted a successful benefit concert to raise funds for the Costa Rican rainforest. This fall, they will host a youth conference with an environmental emphasis.

The “Jumping January” workshops in 2008, organized and run by the Religious Education Committee, offered 4 opportunities for adults to view and discuss a DVD with a environmental theme: “Evolutionary Spirituality”, “Planet Earth”, “Strange Days on Planet Earth” and “Thirty Days in the Alaskan National Wildlife Reserve”.

The Adult Religious Education Committee has been active for the past 2 years in presenting opportunities for congregants to share and learn from each other how to preserve our planet.

- 2006 – Power Point Presentation on “Climate Change and Peak Oil” by congregant Dick Rehberg, followed by discussion
- May 2007 – 9 inch Blue Spruce tree saplings distributed to 150 congregants at the conclusion of Sunday services
- May 2007 – “Environmental IQ Test” distributed to congregants during service one week, followed by the “Answer Key” the next Sunday
- February 2008 – Power Point presentation on “Our Planetary Crisis” by congregant Wes Ernsberger, followed by discussion

### **Worship and Celebration**

The UUCB offers a number of regularly scheduled nature-based services each year. These include the annual Flower Communion, a celebration of Beltaine, our Ingathering Ceremony with water communion, and the Blessing of the Animals. Author and congregant Trebbe Johnson led “Magical Encounters with Nature” during the summer of 2006 and, in conjunction with the Environmental Task Force, “Get Caught in the Web of Life” in October 2007. Additionally, a service introduced our congregation to our new labyrinth, located just outside our sanctuary with a tree at its center. In June 2008, Connie Barlow led a service on Brain Evolution. This was a follow-up to a service the previous year led by Connie and her husband Michael, entitled “Thank God for Evolution”.

Another way our congregation celebrates the earth and its wonders is by annually offering a “Sheepwatch” at a congregant’s farm as one of the items in our silent auction. Our young adult association also had a service during which they went to the Susquehanna River, which runs adjacent to our property, and performed a ceremony of letting-go.

## **Conclusions**

The culture of the UUCB leans toward environmental awareness and action. For many of our congregants, a close connection with the natural world is elemental to their spiritual life. However, there are areas in which we could better “walk the talk” in order to become a more sustainable community. Furthermore, we can put our faith into action in more projects that extend this concern to the wider community and world at large. Becoming a Green Sanctuary Congregation is a vehicle through which we can make this happen.

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