



Green Sanctuary
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Congregational Stewardship Services
25 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02108
617.948.4251

Application for Green Sanctuary Accreditation

Congregation Information

Congregation Name: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Binghamton (UUCB)

Address: 183 Riverside Drive, Binghamton, NY 13905

Web site: UUCB: www.uubinghamton.org

UUCB Green Sanctuary: www.uubinghamton.org/gs/green.html

Green Sanctuary Contact: Wes Ernsberger (Chair)

Address: 19 Lake Street, Owego, NY 13827

Phone: 607-342-6049

Email: wesernsberger@gmail.com

Minister: Rev. Douglas Taylor

Congregation Profile

UUCB serves Binghamton, NY and the surrounding communities within a 30-mile radius. The nearest UUs to us are in Ithaca, Oneonta, and Athens, PA.

Our congregation currently has about 270 adult members, 40 adult friends, and 100 children. Its size has remained relatively constant over the last several years. Our staff consists of a full time minister and the following part-time positions: Director of Religious Education, Assistant for Religious Education, Office Manager, Music Director, Organist, Custodian, and Sunday Setup Coordinator. We have strong Religious Education and Music programs. Our congregation is quite active – there are activities, events, and programs going on all the time. Many congregants volunteer their time to help make all of this happen.

We moved to our current location and church building on Riverside Drive in 1958. In our candidacy application, we noted that we are adjacent to a hospital that is expanding and that the possibility of our deciding to sell our property to the hospital was a barrier to our making large capital improvements. Since then, although our congregation has not made a formal decision, a broad consensus has developed that we wish to remain at our present location. Now, the main factor that inhibits our making large capital improvements is financial, made more difficult by the recent economic conditions.

Congregational Vote

Please refer to the accompanying PDF file entitled “UUCB Annual Meeting Minutes 2010” for documentation of our congregational vote. Here is the statement that we voted on:

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Binghamton, recognize the need to join with others to bring forth a sustainable society based on respect for our planet and all of its life-giving resources. Accordingly, we request that our Green Sanctuary Committee apply to the UUA for our congregation to become accredited as a Green Sanctuary. Furthermore, we make the following ongoing commitments:

- *To further integrate the Seventh Principle - respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part - into our worship services, celebrations, and religious education programs.*
- *To continually strive to have a net positive impact on the environment, both as a congregation and in our personal lives.*
- *To encourage our local, regional, and world communities to do the same.*

Completion of Action Plan

Worship and Celebration Projects (2 required)

Project Title: Earth Day Service

Project Description and Action: Each year we schedule an annual service to be held on or close to Earth Day each April. Besides tailoring the focal point, readings, sermon, and music to fit an ecological message, we offer a special environmental table during the social hour to increase the congregation’s awareness of both our awe and reverence of nature and our role in protecting the planet. We first did this in 2009 with a service entitled “How to Circle the Earth” that pointed out the multiple ways in which we are connected with nature and the environment. In 2010, the service “Breaking Free” explored how we can find our true selves and how that often manifests itself in our becoming more closely aligned with the natural world.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in April, 2009 (ongoing)

Outcomes: The congregation was quite receptive to these special services. The 2010 service worked especially well – perhaps because the sermon topic was not expressly environmental. As

such, we were able to show the connection between personal fulfillment and taking environmental action. The Green Sanctuary table we provided during social hour had many visitors and was a good opportunity for us to discuss environmental issues with individual congregants.

Lead: Trebbe Johnson

Project Title: Bearing Witness to Coal

Project Description and Action: This was a vigil that we held at our local coal-fired power plant. It was held on Oct 24, 2009 as one of over 5400 350.org “Day of Climate Action” events that took place that day around the world. Instead of protesting or blaming, we gathered to reflect, up close, on the source of power that, as much as we want to hate it, we are all complicit in using. For more information, reflections, and pictures regarding this event, see radicaljoyforhardtimes.blogspot.com/2009/10/message-to-power-plant-350.html.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in October, 2009

Outcomes: We first experienced being there in silence and then shared our feelings with each other. The experience was quite moving. We also felt good about being part of the 350.org actions taking place that day to create greater awareness of climate change and influence the world’s leaders to take action.

Lead: Trebbe Johnson

Religious Education Projects (2 required, 1 for children and 1 for adults)

Project Title: Summer RE 2008

Project Description and Action: Every summer at UUCB, RE offers a set of educational opportunities for children that take place during the Sunday service. In 2008, these were based on UU Ministry For Earth’s “Hands on Nature” curriculum, which emphasizes our connections to the natural world.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in August, 2008

Outcomes: These sessions were well received. The teaching staff for each Sunday’s topic typically consisted of one parent and one member of the congregation having interest in, and knowledge of, the aspect of the natural world being investigated that Sunday. The following year, the curriculum was based upon UUMFE’s “We are All Connected” and it also worked well for us.

Lead: Lynn Garman

Project Title: Critical Environmental Issues Discussion Group

Project Description and Action: Each year, we organize a series of discussions at UUCB that focus on critical environmental issues. In the 2008-2009 church year, we organized 8 educational events and in 2009-2010 we organized 8 more. For 2009-2010, the topics were Tipping Point, The New Economy of Nature, Creating the Battery Technology Essential for a Green Economy, Climate Change, Story of Stuff, Greening the City of Binghamton, Saving Energy in Our Homes, and Hybrid Fuel-Efficient Buses and Trucks.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in June, 2009 (ongoing)

Outcomes: After experimenting with different dates and times, we decided that it is normally best to hold these events shortly after our second Sunday service. This project is one of the key

things that we do. In addition to fostering greater environmental awareness, these events often attract people from outside the congregation and also are a great way for us to find additional people who are interested in participating in Green Sanctuary projects.

Lead: Dick Rehberg

*Environmental Justice (2 required, 1 long-term that **actively** promotes justice for those affected by environmental injustices and creates relationships)*

Project Title: UUCB Faith-in-Action Community Nutrition Project (Note: In our candidacy application this project was called “Sarah Jane Johnson UMC Meals Collaboration”.)

Project Description and Action: Sarah Jane Johnson United Methodist Church (in Johnson City) provides a weekly hot meal to about 125 people in need. As an ongoing commitment, members of our congregation provide a salad once every month in order to help make the meals more nutritious. We use locally grown produce when practical during the growing season. Starting in 2010, we also rent a plot at a nearby community garden and use it to grow lettuce and other vegetables for the salads.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in June, 2009 (ongoing)

Outcomes: This has been a most rewarding project. It is a great way for us to form connections with each other, another church in our area, people in need, and people involved with our local community gardens.

Lead: Susan McAnanama

Project Title: The Threat of Drilling for Unnatural Gas

Project Description and Action: Currently, the most urgent environmental issue in our area is whether to allow gas companies to drill for natural gas in the Marcellus Shale formation using the hydraulic fracturing technique. There is much evidence from other parts of the country that use of this technique frequently causes serious environmental and human health damage, mostly by contamination of the water supply. For this project, we work with other local environmental organizations to inform the public about these dangers and to lobby New York State to either regulate this form of gas drilling effectively or ban it outright.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in February, 2010 (ongoing)

Outcomes: Although we have been involved in many ways, here are our three main actions to date: In November, 2009, we and our local Sierra Club chapter co-sponsored an informational gas drilling forum held in our sanctuary. Many people from the Binghamton area attended. In January, 2010, we joined many other environmental groups at an anti-gas drilling rally in Albany. In April, we collected signatures for a NY State gas drilling moratorium petition and a carbon tax petition. This project will continue until this issue is resolved.

Lead: Rema Loeb

Sustainable Living (4 required, 1 that addresses energy conservation)

Project Title: Low Cost UUCB Energy Efficiency Items

Project Description and Action: Make the following improvements to increase the energy efficiency of our church building:

- Insulate all hot water pipes that provide heat from the boiler.
- Install all available storm windows.
- Replace remaining high-usage incandescent lights with CFLs whenever practical.
- Seal all cracks that are causing heat loss.

Each of these items was judged to be cost-effective and sufficiently low in cost so as to be payable out of the regular annual budget allotted to the Property Committee. Larger items that would require a capital improvements campaign must wait until the board is ready to authorize a capital improvement drive.

Timeline for Completion: To be completed in September, 2010 (see Outcomes, below)

Outcomes: All of the planned improvements have been made except for the hot water pipe insulation. The pipe insulation was too expensive (about \$400) to be contained within the Property Committee's budget but we were able to obtain a grant from our Endowment Committee for the required funds. We have purchased the pipe insulation and our youth group will install it in September so that it will be in place prior to the next heating season. As follow-up, we will track UUCB usage of electricity and gas over time to quantify the degree to which these and other future improvements reduce our energy consumption. We will post the results to increase our congregation's awareness of energy efficiency and what can be done to improve it.

Lead: Wes Ernsberger

Project Title: Composting at UUCB (ongoing)

Project Description and Action: Set up an ongoing system for composting our kitchen scraps. This includes the construction and use of a compost bin, a compost bucket in the kitchen, and an intermediate-sized, covered compost container that is located just outside the kitchen. It also includes education of those affected, a written procedure covering the whole composting process, and a "compost team" to carry out the various parts of the procedure.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in May, 2009

Outcomes: The composting process is now running smoothly and the congregation appreciates this as part of "how we do things here". This year we have our first usable compost! As part of our RE program this year, the children used some of the compost to improve the soil used for bucket gardens they created. These were later donated to needy families. We are now using our compost to improve the soil in the flower beds around the church building. This project has also inspired a number of congregants to start composting at home. Future plans are to expand our composting at UUCB to include all yard waste and to add a tour of our composting facilities to our children's RE program.

Lead: Susan McAnanama and Carol Miyake

Project Title: Non-Toxic Cleaning Supplies for UUCB

Project Description and Action: We made an inventory of cleaning supplies currently used at UUCB, did a literature search of non-toxic equivalents, and then started using these at UUCB. The results of the literature search and our direct experience at UUCB formed the basis for information made available to the congregation (see www.etmsolar.com/gsuu/gs/nontoxic_cleaning.htm) so that people are encouraged to try these ideas at home.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in January, 2010

Outcomes: All of the product improvements made at UUCB have worked out fine so we are continuing to use them. The information we provided to the congregation seems to be generally useful so we provided the link to it on the UUA Green Sanctuary listserv.

Lead: Lynne Theophanis and Beverly Singer

Project Title: Reusable Shopping Bags

Project Description and Action: The long term goal of this project is for disposable plastic and paper shopping bags to be phased out in favor of reusable shopping bags. Our strategy consists of two steps: 1) Encourage voluntary use of reusable bags and 2) Ask our local governments to either ban the use of disposable bags or to strongly discourage their use by imposing a tax on them. This project is now well underway. We have sent letters to the local managers and/or CEOs of the leading supermarkets in our area requesting that they make specific changes in signage and cashier training that would help encourage their customers to use reusable bags. We also created and distributed a flier that explains the environmental damage caused by disposable bags, the benefits of reusable bags, what other municipalities around the country are doing, and suggested legislative action we could take here (see www.etmsolar.com/gsuu/gs/rbi_flier.pdf). Finally, we collected 166 signatures in support of taking such action and discussed this issue with some of our local political leaders.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in June, 2010 (ongoing)

Outcomes: Based on what we have learned so far, we feel that our area is not yet ready for a big push for legislation that would, for example, put a tax on disposable bags. Therefore, our near-term plan is to continue our efforts to publicize the facts about disposable versus reusable bags and to look for additional ways to encourage the voluntary use of reusable shopping bags.

Lead: Gerri Wiley and Dick Rehberg

Additional (2 required, these can relate to the program elements of your choice)

Project Title: Jumpin' January 2009 Environmental Sessions

Program Element: Environmental Education

Project Description and Action: Jumpin' January is a series of workshops that take place during Sunday services during the month of January. These are designed to appeal to both children and adults. In 2009, four of our activities had an environmental theme.

- Sew and decorate reusable shopping bags that are made from old tee-shirts (tee-bags workshops).
- Show a short video called "Sun Cookers" that explains how reflective devices are used to cook meals in central Africa and other sunny areas so that scarce firewood does not have to be gathered and burned. We then set up, examined, and discussed an actual solar cooking device.
- Organize a panel discussion on Fair Trade.
- Show and discuss "The Story of Stuff" video.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in January, 2009

Outcomes: The reusable shopping bags workshop was quite popular with the children – so much so that we ended up repeating it the following year. While making the bags, we explained why the use of reusable bags is so much better for the environment. We created a collage of

pictures for publicity on our bulletin board. The other three events were appreciated but only a few children attended them.

Lead: Lynn Garman

Project Title: Share Environmental Books, Magazines, and DVDs

Program Element: Environmental Education

Project Description and Action: Create and maintain a pool of high-quality, timely environmental books, magazines, CDs, and DVDs that can be shared by members of the congregation. Some of these are donated to the UUCB library and are kept there. Other items are held by individual members of the congregation who are willing to lend them out upon request. A list of all such items is maintained. One copy of the list is displayed in the UUCB library and another copy is on our UUCB Green Sanctuary web page

(www.etmsolar.com/gsuu/greenbooks.pdf).

Timeline for Completion: Completed in August, 2009 (ongoing)

Outcomes: The presence of a shelf of books in our church library on environmental issues has served to emphasize the importance we place on the environment. This project also represents a first step in our efforts to encourage a spirit of sharing what we have with each other instead of the prevailing tendency in our culture for each household to buy things for their own use, even when they are needed infrequently.

Lead: Wes Ernsberger

Project Title: Ethical Eating Film Series

Program Element: Environmental Education

Project Description and Action: During each of the first three months of 2009, we showed a film at UUCB that illustrates some aspect of the problems with our current food system. Each film showing was followed by a discussion of what we can learn from the film and what actions we can take to improve the situation. The three films were: 1) The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil, 2) Banana Split, and 3) Flow. These were co-sponsored by Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition (BRSC), our area's main environmental group, who helped us out with publicity and showed the films at two other venues in the Binghamton area.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in May, 2009

Outcomes: Each of these events was well attended. Judging from the spirited discussions after the film showings, these films were impactful and thought-provoking. The collaboration with BRSC turned out to be an effective way for us to leverage our efforts. Many more people from outside the congregation attended than would have otherwise done so.

Lead: Susan McAnanama

Project Title: UUCB/VINES Collaboration

Program Element: Earth Justice

Project Description and Action: UUCB provides ongoing assistance to Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments (VINES – Binghamton's community gardens organization) by serving as an integral part of their leadership, helping with publicity at major events such as July

Fest, publicizing work parties to the congregation, and renting/improving one of their garden plots (see the UUCB Faith-in-Action Community Nutrition Project description, above).

Timeline for Completion: Completed in June, 2010 (ongoing)

Outcomes: This project has helped us to establish strong connections to, and significantly strengthen, an important environmental organization in our community. The VINES organization provides vital assistance to under-served neighborhoods in our community by helping them to grow nutritious food themselves.

Lead: Carol Miyake

Project Title: October 24th Climate Change Day of Action

Program Element: Earth Justice

Project Description and Action: We teamed up with several other local environmental groups including BRSC, our local chapter of the Sierra Club, and Binghamton University to organize an event we called “Convergence at the Confluence” – a reference to the location where the Chenango River joins the Susquehanna River in downtown Binghamton. It took place on Saturday, Oct 24, 2009 as part of 350.org’s call for thousands of events that day in order to focus attention on the seriousness and urgency of climate change and the need for the delegates to the December Copenhagen conference to create the strongest possible international climate agreement.

Timeline for Completion: Completed in October, 2009

Outcomes: Well, we didn’t seem to have much influence on Copenhagen – but the notion of 350 ppm (a decrease from where we are now) being the right target has certainly caught on worldwide in a big way. A steady rain forced our event indoors but there were a lot of interesting people to meet and things to do. We all got together for a group picture and sent it, and others, to 350.org: www.flickr.com/search/?q=binghamton&w=25654955%40N03

Lead: Susan McAnanama

Accomplishment of Program Goals

- To build awareness of societal environmental issues among UUs.

Our congregation is now much more aware of environmental issues as a result of our Green Sanctuary activities. This was accomplished primarily through the many educational events that we offered. Many of these were organized through our ongoing Critical Environmental Issues Discussion Group project. They were supplemented by other events such as those organized by the Ethical Eating Film Series project. Another important source of awareness was through environmentally oriented Sunday services. These had the benefit of reaching a large segment of our congregation.

- To generate commitment for personal lifestyle changes.

The best success we have had in this area has come from 1) the Personal Assessment Survey and 2) one of our current projects (not listed above) that we call EcoPact. We discovered that the greatest benefit of the survey was that it got people thinking about

their environmentally-related personal practices. The EcoPact project followed up on this by providing a list of 34 environmental practices and asking the participants to indicate which practices they already do and which ones they commit to begin doing (uubinghamton.org/Downloads/EcoPact_FINAL.pdf). These efforts reached a substantial proportion of our congregation. The Personal Assessment Survey was taken by 119 people while the EcoPact commitment form was filled out by 81 households representing 138 participating people. We plan to redo the EcoPact commitment periodically in order to reach more people and to quantify how many lifestyle changes were actually made.

- To motivate UU's to community action on environmental issues.

Through our participation in the Green Sanctuary Program, we have found ourselves becoming increasingly involved in the community. We have already mentioned our frequent collaborations with other local environmental groups such as Sierra Club, VINES, and BRSC. We have also established contacts with other churches, namely Sarah Jane Johnson United Methodist Church and Vestal United Methodist Church, as a result of our projects. Our educational offerings have drawn in speakers from Binghamton University, the City of Binghamton, and BAE Systems. Our participation in the October 24th Day of Climate Action resulted in collaboration with students from Binghamton University and BOCES (a local job training school).

We have completed, and are working on, numerous community action projects. Some examples: The Threat of Drilling for Unnatural Gas, Reusable Shopping Bags, Earth Fest 2010 Participation, Gas Drilling Rally in Albany, October 24th Climate Change Day of Action, and the Gas Drilling Forum on November 18.

- To build a connection between spiritual practice and environmental consciousness.

We have made good progress here. One especially beneficial change we made was to keep in touch with our Worship Committee as to which upcoming services have connections to environmental issues and/or the natural world. For most such services, we now organize an event that reinforces the theme of the service. For example, when our guest minister delivered a sermon on ethical eating, we hosted a Green Sanctuary table during social hour at which we provided information about farmers' markets and CSAs in our area. As another example, our minister gave an environmental sermon called "Eek-ology", after which he led a congregational response discussion group during social hour where we brainstormed ways in which we could further integrate our Seventh Principle values into our church activities. This led to several additional project ideas.

- To build awareness of and rectify environmental injustices.

Like many UUs, our church has long been quite active on social justice issues. Our Social Justice Committee recognizes that more and more social justice issues are environmental in nature. Accordingly, when we started the Green Sanctuary program, our Social Justice Committee agreed to take responsibility for identifying and

coordinating Earth Justice projects through their committee. This has worked quite well and is in keeping with our long term goal of having much of UUCB's environmental work handled through our existing committees as a natural part of what we do.

We feel that we made significant progress on a number of environmental injustices through projects such as: The Threat of Drilling for Unnatural Gas, UUCB Faith-in-Action Community Nutrition Project, UUCB/VINES Collaboration, and the October 24th Climate Change Day of Action.

Program Evaluation

- What do you believe has been the most important benefit your congregation has gained as a result of your participation in the Green Sanctuary Program?

Our participation has greatly increased our awareness of how serious environmental issues are in the world today and has caused many of us to start taking actions to make things better. These actions include personal lifestyle changes, helping those in need, earth justice advocacy, environmental education, and influencing others.

- What has been the most difficult or challenging aspect of the program for your congregation to achieve?

We would very much like to get more of the congregation involved. Of our active members, roughly 10% participate regularly in our projects and events. Our most successful efforts to reach a large segment of our congregation have been the Personal Assessment Survey and EcoPact project, as mentioned above, which achieved about 60% participation. We will continue our efforts to reach more of the congregation, realizing that there will always be those who feel they are too busy or who are not yet oriented towards environmental concerns.

- Have you been able to discern positive changes in your congregation's culture as a result of the activities you accomplished? If so, what are they?

Yes. For example:

- A higher proportion of the congregation is concerned about the environment. Those who do not yet participate in Green Sanctuary projects are nonetheless supportive of what we are doing.
 - A culture of sustainability has taken hold to the point where sometimes improvements are made without any involvement from the Green Sanctuary Committee. Examples: Putting out more recycling bins, putting up signs that encourage people to use the church's tableware rather than using disposables, and educating those who rent our space to follow green practices while they are here.
- What are your intentions/aspirations for continuing to live out your Green Sanctuary commitments?

We view Green Sanctuary Accreditation as a welcome form of recognition but we know that the path to sustainability is a long one and there is much more to be done. We plan to continue what we are doing and, if possible, even pick up the pace. As of this writing, we have completed 29 projects. Looking to the future, we have 14 completed but ongoing projects, 13 projects that are in progress, and 24 candidate projects. Here is a link to our current project list: www.etmsolar.com/gsuu/gs/GS.Projects.pdf.

We feel that now is an excellent time for us to take a checkpoint and consider our future direction. Here are some of our thoughts:

- Identify more people who would like to lead a Green Sanctuary project.
 - Provide greater support to our project leaders.
 - Continue our efforts to reach more of our congregation.
 - Further integrate environmental thinking into our other committees.
 - Advocate to our board that our church become carbon-neutral.
- What on-going role do you expect your congregation will take in the wider community relative to environmental issues? How do you feel recognition as a Green Sanctuary affects your position in the community?

We have made a good start in getting involved with the wider community and know that it is important that we build on that. We will continue to collaborate with other environmental groups in our area. In addition, we know that other churches in our area are starting to form environmental groups. We wish to seek them out so as to form a network to exchange ideas and identify fruitful areas for collaboration.

We have an important message to deliver to individuals and groups who visit our church or otherwise come in contact with us. That message is about the critical environmental problems that confront humanity and what we, as a congregation and as individuals, can do to effectively respond to those challenges. Our being recognized as a Green Sanctuary will increase our visibility and credibility in the community and therefore help us to deliver that message.

Application Instructions

Using this format, submit your electronic application to greensanctuary@uua.org. If you cannot email the application, please contact Robin Nelson, Program Manager for Congregational Stewardship Services at the UUA, for snail-mail instructions.

For additional information and advice for preparing your application, feel free to contact Robin Nelson via email at RNelson@uua.org or by phone at 617.948.4251.