



Green Sanctuary
The Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth
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Application for Green Sanctuary Candidacy

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)

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Minister: Rev. Douglas Taylor

Congregation Profile

UUCB serves Binghamton 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, 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 the context of the Green Sanctuary program, it is important to note that we are adjacent to a hospital that is growing and expanding. The hospital administration is interested in acquiring our church property for that purpose and has made us offers on multiple occasions. Our congregation has not yet made a definitive decision on whether to accept such an offer or to stay. Consequently, all significant capital improvements to our church facilities have been put on hold until such a decision is made. This has

been the case for the last several years. The UUCB leadership intends to make a definitive decision in the near future.

Green Sanctuary Committee

The Green Sanctuary Committee was created as a standing committee by a vote of the congregation in June, 2008. We do not have a charter as it is not the practice of our congregation to prepare a committee charter when a new committee is formed.

UUCB's Green Sanctuary Committee is organized as follows: Wes Ernsberger serves as Chair. Reporting to him are the Communications Leader (Gerri Wiley) and the Project Leaders (see Action Plan). In addition, we have a Project Focus Area Leader for each of the four project focus areas defined by the Green Sanctuary Process: Worship & Celebration (Darlyne Mitchell), Environmental Education (Dick Rehberg), Earth Justice (Susan McAnanama) and Sustainable Living (Wes Ernsberger, acting). The primary role of the Project Focus Area Leaders is to provide guidance and assistance to the project leaders. As much as possible, we integrate our activities back into the relevant pre-existing committees. In the case of Earth Justice, this integration is essentially complete – all Earth Justice projects are managed by the Social Justice Committee.

Environmental Assessment

We conducted our Personal Assessment through the use of a SurveyMonkey survey. Most of the congregants took the survey online but a paper version of the survey was also available. It was completed in July, 2008. The Congregational Assessment was mostly done by interviewing the appropriate members and staff, supplemented by walk-through observations. It was completed in September, 2008. See <http://uubinghamton.org/gs/ea.html> for complete survey results and Congregational Assessment report. A summary of the major findings and recommendations follows:

Personal Assessment: The personal assessment survey turned out to be an excellent way to inspire our congregation to think carefully about their personal practices and to create early awareness of our Green Sanctuary activities. The write-in comments helped to identify areas where congregants felt the need for more information. Examples include composting, home energy efficiency, special considerations for those who rent, how to purchase renewably-generated electricity, how to collect rainwater, examples of low-cost cleaning products, and how to properly dispose of used batteries. These comments helped to generate project ideas.

Congregational Assessment:

- **Energy Usage:** Although we already do a number of things well, there are many improvement opportunities here. We divided them into low-cost items and more expensive capital improvement items. We can do the low-cost items right away but the more expensive items have to wait until we have decided whether to stay at our present location (see Congregation Profile for background).

- Low Cost Items: Convert remaining high-usage incandescent lights to CFLs; Insulate all boiler pipes; Install all available storm windows; Upgrade library computer to one that draws less power when not in use; Purchase renewably-generated electricity
- More Expensive Items: Install window quilts and shades; Replace the boiler with a more efficient one; Insulate the sanctuary roof when the shingles are next replaced; Improve wall insulation; Install PV solar panels on roof
- Food: At church functions, we could offer more food that is of high nutritional value, organic, and locally grown.
- Transportation: Improve the bicycling and carpooling options that are available.
- Water Use: Looks ok. One improvement possibility would be to capture water in rain barrels and use it for gardening.
- Disposal of Materials: We already do a good job with recycling. We already make significant use of our reusable tableware. We should consider using it exclusively so as to completely avoid paper plates, plastic utensils, etc, and also encourage those who rent our space to do so as well. Composting our kitchen scraps would be a good idea.
- Purchasing: We're in pretty good shape here. Look for additional improvements.
- Maintenance of the Building: Switch to green cleaning products. Investigate greener options for pest control.
- Landscaping and Grounds Care: Discuss greener options with the company we have contracted to mow our lawn and collect leaves; Compost our leaves.
- Investing: Encourage our Endowment Committee to invest in companies with environmentally friendly practices.
- Social Justice: This is a very active committee at UUCB which is already starting to incorporate some Earth Justice activities. Some possibilities for doing more in this area: Expand the Equal Exchange program to include more products; Increase educational offerings that focus on Earth Justice issues.

- **Religious Education (RE):** Due to the increased focus on environmental issues leading to the formation of the Green Sanctuary Committee, both children's and adult RE have already been moving to include more environmental themes into the RE curriculum. Some possibilities for improving upon this: For children's RE, we could include exploration of the natural world into the summer RE program. For adult RE, we need to increase the number of educational programs we offer so that our congregants and guests from the community have a better understanding of the environmental issues we face and what we can do about them.
- **Worship and Celebration:** We're in pretty good shape here. No suggestions at this time.

Action Plan

Our action plan consists of the following 14 projects. Our approach has been to launch each project as soon as it has a project leader who wants to get started with it. Accordingly, some of the projects have already been completed, others are in progress, and others are just getting started.

For ongoing projects, the specified target completion date designates when we expect that project to have been in operation long enough that we are confident it is working well and it can be continued into the future.

We do other projects in addition to the 14 described here. As of this writing, our project list consists of 13 completed projects, 5 completed (but ongoing) projects, 23 in-progress projects, and 20 project candidates. See <http://www.etmsolar.com/gsuu/gs/> for our project list as of 6/1/2009 and our current project list.

Worship and Celebration

1. Earth Day Service (Trebbe Johnson)

We will 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 will offer a special environmental table during the social hour and, whenever possible, other activities during the day to increase the congregation's awareness of both our awe and reverence of nature and our role in protecting the planet.

Completed in April, 2009 (ongoing)

2. Greening our Worship Service (Trebbe Johnson)

Our goal is to connect our awe of nature with serving and saving the planet. We will work with the Worship Committee and with other Green Sanctuary members on an ongoing basis to expand the ways in which UUCB incorporates earth-based themes into our services. Here are some possibilities:

- Expand our current nature-oriented services to include environmental education and practical actions. For example, our yearly Flower Communion could include a reading and/or meditation on the mysterious colony collapse disorder of honeybees, and our Water Communion might feature a cleanup along the Susquehanna River just behind our property.
- Develop at least two services with nature/ecology themes each year, including at least one by a guest speaker.
- Create a special earth-centered reading for the chalice lighting and using it on a regular basis.
- Include readings with ecological messages, whether or not the service specifically focuses on an ecological theme.
- Take advantage of earth-based services to offer activities like nature walks, special tables at the social hour to promote organic food, free-trade coffee, and other local and global environmental efforts.

Target Completion Date: June, 2010 (ongoing)

Environmental Education

1. Critical Environmental Issues Discussion Group (Dick Rehberg)

We will organize a series of discussions at UUCB that focus on critical environmental issues, including: 1) The interrelated web of life, 2) Climate change and the issue of fossil vs. renewable energy, 3) Why a warming and crowded planet requires a green revolution, and 4) Capitalism, the environment, and crossing from crisis to sustainability. Other topics may be added as appropriate. Although the format can vary, typically we will first present material (a presentation, viewing a film, etc) and follow that with discussion. Each event will be publicized to the congregation and the community.

Completed in June, 2009 (ongoing)

2. Share Environmental Books, Magazines, and DVDs (Wes Ernsberger)

Create and maintain a pool of high-quality, timely environmental books (as well as magazines, CDs, and DVDs) that can be shared by members of the congregation. Some of these will be donated to the UUCB library and be kept there. Other items will be held

by individual members of the congregation who are willing to lend them out upon request. A list of all such items will be maintained. One copy of the list will be displayed in the UUCB library and another copy will be on our UUCB Green Sanctuary web page.

Target Completion Date: August, 2009 (ongoing)

3. Jumpin' January 2009 Environmental Sessions (Lynn Garman)

Jumpin' January is a series of activities that takes place during the two Sunday services during the month of January. These are designed to appeal to both children and adults. For adults, these activities are an alternative to attending the worship service. This year, four of our activities will have an environmental theme.

- Sew and decorate reusable shopping bags that are made from old t-shirts.
- Show a short video called "Sun Cookers" that explains how reflective devices are used to cook meals in central Africa so that scarce firewood does not have to be gathered and burned. That will be followed by setting up, examining, and discussing an actual solar cooking device.
- Organize a panel discussion on Fair Trade.
- Show and discuss "The Story of Stuff" video.

Completed in January, 2009

Earth Justice

1. UUCB/VINES Collaboration (Carol Miyake)

UUCB will provide ongoing assistance to Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments (VINES – Binghamton's community gardens organization) by organizing at least one work day (intergenerational, if possible) and at least one fund raising event each year. We will also have a UUCB member attend the VINES meetings so we can identify further areas where we might be of assistance.

Target Completion Date: June, 2010 (ongoing)

2. Ethical Eating Film Series (Susan McAnanama)

During each of the first three months of 2009, we will show a film at UUCB that illustrates some aspect of the problems with our current food system. This will be 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 are: 1) The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil, 2) Banana Split, and 3) Flow. These will be co-sponsored with Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition (BRSC), who will work with us on publicity and show the films at two other venues in the Binghamton area.

Completed in March, 2009

3. **Sarah Jane Johnson UMC Meals Collaboration** (Susan McAnanama)

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 will provide a salad once every month in order to help make the meals more nutritious. We will use locally grown produce when practical during the growing season. Some of this will be obtained from UUCB congregants who donate excess produce from their home vegetable gardens.

Completed in June, 2009 (ongoing)

4. **October 24th Day of Action** (Susan McAnanama)

The Social Justice Committee will organize an event to take place on Saturday, Oct 24 as part of 350.org's call for thousands of events that day in order to focus attention on the seriousness and urgency of the climate change problem and the need for the delegates to the December Copenhagen conference to create the strongest possible international climate agreement. We will also partner with BRSC (our local sustainability coalition), our local Sierra Club chapter, and others to encourage and assist with the organization of other such events in our area.

Target Completion Date: October, 2009

Sustainable Living

1. **Composting at UUCB** (Susan McAnanama and Carol Miyake)

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.

Completed in May, 2009 (ongoing)

2. **Low-Cost UUCB Energy Efficiency Items** (Wes Ernsberger)

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 is 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 UUCB congregation has made a definitive decision to stay at our present location (see Congregation Profile).

Target Completion Date: January, 2010

3. **Non-Toxic Cleaning Supplies for UUCB** (Lynne Theophanis and Beverly Singer)

We will make an inventory of cleaning supplies currently used at UUCB, do a literature search of non-toxic equivalents, and then try these at UUCB. We will continue to use all substituted cleaning supplies that work satisfactorily. The results of the literature search and our direct experience at UUCB will form the basis for information to be made available to the congregation so that people are encouraged to try these ideas at home.

Target Completion Date: June, 2010

4. **Rain Barrels** (Lillian Theophanis)

The purpose of this project is to encourage the construction and use of rain barrels to capture roof runoff so that the water can be put to a useful purpose (such as watering a garden) instead of adding to flood problems in the watershed. This project will consist of two workshops. The first of these was held in Halstead, PA on March 28, 2009. Five UUCB members attended to learn about rain barrels, watershed issues, and to receive a free rain barrel. The second workshop will be organized by UUCB and held locally so that more members of our community have an opportunity to access the information, collect the resources needed to construct the rain barrel water collectors, and build rain gardens at their homes and places of worship.

Target Completion Date: June, 2010

5. Reusable Shopping Bags (Gerri Wiley)

A letter, signed by UUCB members, will be sent to managers and regional CEOs of grocery stores, describing the rationale for working toward elimination of paper and plastic bags. It will encourage:

- 1) Ready availability of low-cost, reusable bags at the checkout.
- 2) Outside signage, reminding shoppers to bring their reusable bags from their cars.
- 3) Training cashiers to ask if the customer would like a reusable bag prior to asking "Paper or plastic?"

UUCB participants in this project will:

- Survey one or more grocery stores for current practices.
- Acquire UUCB member signatures supporting these proposals.
- Send the letter and signatures to local grocery managers and regional CEOs.
- Meet with the managers to discuss the possibility of implementing this plan.
- Survey the same stores in one year.

Target Completion Date: June, 2010

Communications Plan

We use the following methods to communicate with our congregation and to invite their participation:

- We have established a half-page column called "Green Matters" that appears in every issue of our church's biweekly newsletter (The Beacon). We use this to publicize upcoming Green Sanctuary events and to pass along green living tips. We also use it to inform the congregation about projects they may wish to help with, provide information about the Green Sanctuary Program at UUCB, publicize our Green Sanctuary web page, and so forth.
- We also publicize upcoming events through the use of spoken announcements before Sunday services and printed announcements in the Sunday Order of Service insert.

- We maintain a UUCB Green Sanctuary web page (<http://uubinghamton.org/gs/green.html>) that contains background on the Green Sanctuary Program, information on projects and events, green tips, links to other local environmental groups, links to local recycling information, and links to UUMFE and UUA Green Sanctuary information.
- We maintain a bulletin board in the hallway next to the Social Hall entrance. It contains much of the same information that is on our web page as an alternative source of information and awareness, particularly for those who do not have regular Internet access. It always includes a number of flyers that interested congregants can take with them.
- We periodically sponsor Social Hour (after both Sunday services), including nutritious snacks (made, when practical, with locally grown and organic foods) and a Green Sanctuary table with information about our events and projects as well as general environmental information.
- From time to time we make use of “Matters of our Lives” to speak out on environmental issues during our Sunday services. This is a block of time (about 5 minutes) that is scheduled by our minister into certain worship services. It is used by a member of the congregation to speak to the congregation on a specified topic of interest or concern.
- The Chair participates in bimonthly Program Council meetings, the purpose of which is to share information between committees. The Chair also, when pertinent, represents the Green Sanctuary Committee at board meetings and the meetings of other committees.
- We have a liaison to the Board and to each other committee that ties in closely with Green Sanctuary: Property, Religious Education, Adult Religious Education, Worship, and Social Justice. When possible, this liaison is a member of both committees.

We have established the following additional means to communicate with other environmental groups and the community at large:

- We coordinate with other environmental groups in our area through UUCB members who are also members of those groups. In this way, we have a working relationship with each of the following groups: Sierra Club Susquehanna Chapter, BRSC (Binghamton Regional Sustainability Coalition -- our regional “umbrella” organization for environmental groups), and VINES (Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments – a community gardening organization in Binghamton).
- For each event we organize that is of interest to the general public, we publicize it by issuing a press release to our local newspaper, by posting it on WSKG’s Community Education Calendar (WSKG is our region’s public broadcasting station), and by posting an announcement on BRSC’s BinghamtonSustainability email group.