

UUCSC Seeking Accreditation as a Green Sanctuary Church

At its June meeting, the UUCSC Board of Directors formally authorized the creation of a committee to apply for candidacy for accreditation as a Green Sanctuary church. Green Sanctuary accreditation is a Unitarian Universalist Association program that identifies congregations that have made a commitment to sustainable living practices.

More poetically, the Green Sanctuary Program, originally called the Seventh Principle Project, “was designed to give roots and wings to the vision that, together, we can create a world in which all people make reverence, gratitude, and care for the living Earth that is central to our lives,” according to the Green Sanctuary page of the UUA web site (<http://www.uua.org/leaders/environment/green-sanctuary/index.shtml>.)

A total of 128 congregations have received the UUA’s Green Sanctuary certification. Though none are in Rhode Island, there are 24 Green Sanctuary congregations in New England. Two of our fellow Rhode Island UU congregations—Westminster in East Greenwich and Channing Memorial in Newport— also are pursuing accreditation. UUCSC had considered seeking certification a few years ago but the effort was put on hold when it became evident that we would be acquiring a home of our own.

Certification is achieved by developing and implementing an Action Plan. The plan is part of the initial application for candidacy and must be approved by the UUA’s Green Sanctuary Program Committee. Essentially, a congregation must conduct twelve sustainable living programs or activities tailored to its particular situation and circumstances. These projects relate to four subject areas: worship and celebration, religious education, environmental justice and sustainable living. At least one project must involve energy conservation and at least one project must be an ongoing activity. Projects that involve partnering with other churches and community organizations are more highly regarded for approval purposes.

Prior to the initial application, a congregation appoints a Green Sanctuary (GS) committee to apply for candidacy. Our committee was chosen on June 17. The new committee is authorized to arrange for a professional energy audit of our facility. We are making arrangements for RISE, a contractor for NationalGrid, for that audit. The committee will also conduct an audit and assessment of UUCSC’s policies and practices in the following areas: recycling and conservation

practices, policies for purchasing and use of non-disposables and cleaning products, investment policies, and landscaping practices.

The audit and assessment of policies and practices provides a baseline from which to measure improvements in the congregation’s ecological practices. Recently more churches have added a component dealing with personal assessments of members’ household practices, after



some initial comments that a congregation could “green” the church but ignore the members’ life style choices, which have an even larger impact on the planet. We intend to include the personal assessment in our Action Plan.

Procedurally, this is what you can expect. The committee will arrange for the energy audit and assessment this summer. In July (tentatively on the 22nd) the committee will hold a recruitment and planning potluck meeting to add members and to flesh out potential choices of projects. This meeting is open to all and success for this project requires as much member participation as possible.

In late August (tentatively on the 25th) we will hold a congregational gathering to present the results of the energy audit and facility assessment. We will seek members’ input and involvement in selecting our projects and strategy for the Action Plan. This event will also include a potluck where we will challenge attendees to bring dishes made entirely or mostly of locally-produced foods.

A draft Action Plan will be written based on your input. We will schedule two or three “cottage meetings” in early Fall to explain and refine the plan. We will be inviting members to conduct individual assessments of their own footprint on the planet in September and October. A separate plan will be made to assist members in things they can do to lessen their impact on our habitat and that project will be one of our GS Sustainable Living projects.

We hope to submit the Action Plan and candidacy application in early to mid November. We expect to begin implementation of the most important elements of the plan even while the UUA is reviewing it. Most congregations need two to three years to complete their plan and apply for the actual accreditation. The final application must be approved by a formal congregational vote.

Green On!

– Rich Evans