

Chapter 5

Green Sanctuary Accreditation

Applying for Accreditation

Your congregation has been working hard for nearly two years, maybe more, to complete all the challenging steps on the journey to becoming a Green Sanctuary. This leg of the journey is almost finished and you're ready to apply for accreditation. You will find the form for this application in Exhibit F. Here you are asked to document the accomplishment of the twelve projects in your Action Plan and summarize your achievement of the program goals. Your application will:

1. Describe what was accomplished for each of the 12 projects in your action plan. Each description will include up to half a page with the following information:
 - What action was taken?
 - How many members of the congregation participated and were there any participants from the local community?
 - What specific outcomes have resulted from the action?
 - Did you change the project from your original proposal?
2. Summarize the degree to which you achieved the Green Sanctuary program goals (see Chapter 1, page 2). The program goals are achieved, not by the specific accomplishment of one or another of your 12 projects, but by the collective impact the entire program has had on your congregation. The application asks you to summarize how your activities and projects have made an impact on your congregation. Your narrative will point to specific projects and will also describe a more subjective sense of the changes you can see in the way individuals and the congregation as a whole have changed. This summary should take two or three pages at most.
3. Finally, include a brief (approximately three pages) program evaluation to document changes that have resulted in your congregation by the various activities you have completed. The following questions are asked in this 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?
 - What has been the most difficult or challenging aspect of the program for your congregation to achieve?
 - 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?

- What are your intentions/aspirations for continuing to live out your Green Sanctuary commitments?
- 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?

This evaluation helps UUMFE determine whether the design of the Green Sanctuary Program is effective in meeting the program goals. It also can help you gauge your success and suggest new directions for living out your commitments after you receive accreditation.

Congregational Vote

Before submitting your application for accreditation, the congregation is asked to vote affirmatively to apply, promising to continue including Earth consciousness in all of your programs and practices, and explicitly committing to living by your Green Sanctuary values.

Your statement of commitment can be as simple or as elaborate as you like, but it should express your willingness to continue making environmentally appropriate choices in all your actions and decisions. One congregation crafted a covenant for their vote, giving added weight to their commitment. An adaptation of their covenant is included as Exhibit G.



Casualty in the Buckthorn Wars (invasive species removal). First Unitarian Church of Duluth, Minnesota

Living the Legacy

The final phase, living as a certified Green Sanctuary, is really the beginning. Ongoing decisions and programs in the congregation will follow your Green Sanctuary values. Various environmental programs and activities will be continued or initiated in future program years, and you will share your experiences and success with the Green Sanctuary community and other congregations through an annual report to the UU Ministry for Earth.

You know you wouldn't run a marathon or complete the Tour de France, and then go back to being a couch potato. And you certainly wouldn't spend a couple of years working hard to become a Green Sanctuary, only to go back to business as usual once you are accredited. Your lovely certificate is hanging on the wall in the fellowship hall. Your church's web site

uses the nifty new Green Sanctuary logo—a chalice with a leaf for a flame. And you’ve held a wonderful celebration to recognize all your great accomplishments.

Through your Green Sanctuary candidate process has been to develop and integrate an Earth consciousness into your individual and congregational lives. You’ve stretched your thinking, increased your awareness, and pushed yourselves to make better decisions and take conscious action to reduce or mitigate environmental damages and strengthen your connections with the Earth.

Knowing what you know now, you can never again choose the easy way out of ignorance or distraction. You must pay attention now to the implications of all your choices for Earth, community, and future generations. You are all set to take your Earth ministry to the next level. But how do you maintain the momentum and continue thriving? What about the long haul? Where do you go from here?

In this ongoing phase of the Green Sanctuary process, you will continue to learn more about specific environmental issues and how they affect human and other-than-human life on this planet. Some of your responses will evolve into appropriate new habits, adopted intentionally to reduce impacts where you can, and to mitigate where you can’t. You will no longer have to choose paper or plastic at the checkout counter because you’ll habitually have those canvas bags with you. For other issues, those that come up only infrequently (like replacing an appliance, or negotiating a new contract for janitorial services), you’ll know what questions to build into the decision-making so that you can make better choices.

And for those really big questions about your role as a faith community in response to a world with so much damage and pain and uncertainty, the discussions and debate will range much broader and deeper when considering the social and economic implications: Why should we pay a higher cost when there are cheaper alternatives? Who is impacted? What is our responsibility for mitigation? How should we counter the greed and carelessness in the world by our decision, right here and right now?

All of these decision processes, from small and immediate to vast and far reaching, will look different now that you are a Green Sanctuary from how they appeared before you began this program. The contents of the debate and the emphasis on various decision elements will be based on a more complete and integrated understanding of the issues and consequences than before.

This journey will not be completed within our lifetime. It is our job to imagine a sustainable future and initiate some processes to get us there; it is for future generations to continue clarifying the vision of Earth community and working to make it a reality.

Several very important recent books consider the process of social change and what is needed to create a sustainable future. In “The Great Turning,” David Korten describes his vision of Earth community. Collaborating with others to strengthen local communities

is central, Korten claims. Creating new structures for economic, political, and spiritual change is also required to ensure these communities are healthy and vibrant. Paul Hawkins describes similar principles in his ground-breaking book, “Blessed Unrest.” In both books, the authors acknowledge the role of religious communities in creating this healthy future, so dramatically different than where we seem to be heading today. Roger Gottlieb affirms this role in “Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet’s Future.”

Important themes are prominent in these and other insightful works, themes that offer wisdom for the journey ahead. Living the legacy of our Green Sanctuary commitments flows easily from these suggested themes:

Strengthening Community

From the very beginning of the Green Sanctuary process, actions you have taken were designed to bring your congregation together. When the entire congregation makes the commitment and follows through, your collective identity as a community that cares for Earth is reinforced. Even if not everyone worked on every project, there is still a collective

“ownership” of the end result. Worshiping together, learning together, solving problems and creating something new as a community; discussing, debating, even arguing (respectfully, of course) at times to arrive at collective decisions; putting our time, energy, and skills to work for a better world; these practices reinforce the bonds that hold us together and strengthen our capacity to change. Each year you will want to take your community to another level, gaining strength, deepening your commitments, and growing closer to that ideal of Earth community you have envisioned.



Elm Dance after Earth Day Service. UU Church of Sarasota, Florida

Walking the Talk.

In the process of becoming a Green Sanctuary, you have proven to yourselves that when you understand what is happening to the Earth because of human activity, you can take action to make a difference. Many of your members have made changes in their personal lives. The congregation as a whole has taken steps to lessen the impacts of your collective footprint. You have also recognized that other communities are suffering from environ-

mental damage they did not cause, so you have tried to reach out to make a difference in the larger community and the wider world.

Collaboration

Paul Hawkins posits in “Blessed Unrest” that the future is emerging through a global grassroots movement unlike any before. Networks, coalitions, alliances, and the myriad groups that are constantly forming and evolving all over the world to address the environmental crisis, are shaping an evolution of Earth community that depends at a very fundamental level on the relationships we discover and develop through collaboration. We know more or less how to collaborate within our congregations, but it is also essential to reach out beyond our familiar boundaries to link up with others who share our hope for the future. This is exactly why the Green Sanctuary program requires you to work with another group or groups on your environmental justice project for accreditation. And as you experience the effectiveness of those collaborative relationships and the hope that emerges when you know you’re not alone, you will not hesitate to continue those relationships and gather new ones. The work gives us satisfaction, but the relationships bring us joy.

So the answer to the question “Where do we go from here?” is “Continue on.” You will continue to work in the four focus areas, further integrating your Green Sanctuary efforts into your congregational life and reaching out farther into the community and the world. You may want to work more deeply on a few issues, or you may decide to branch out and explore new areas. You will nurture the relationships that you’ve already invested in, and you may move into new communities, connecting with strangers who will quickly become friends and allies as they become partners with you in creating Earth community.

Maintaining accreditation

Besides living with this new consciousness and commitment, maintaining Green Sanctuary accreditation requires assuming additional responsibilities. Once you have achieved accreditation as a Green Sanctuary, UUMFE encourages you to continue planning and implementing activities in the four focus areas. To continue your Green Sanctuary journey, we invite you to reinforce and deepen your commitment, a little more each year, and to share your stories with other Unitarian Universalists and the wider community. You will:

- Every 5 to 8 years (sooner if you have a significant change in circumstances), conduct a new energy audit and establish new goals for energy conservation. Based on the results of this audit, implement one or more of the recommendations each year in each focus area.
- On the same time line, repeat your program assessment to provide a new baseline for considering new program directions.
- Implement one or more changes in policy or practice in your congregation to reduce your environmental footprint each year. This may be the year to adopt that policy to direct church investments to environmentally responsible funds. Or perhaps you’re

ready now to purchase new china for the fellowship kitchen and work toward making your meals “zero trash” events.

- Continue to deepen and expand integration of Earth consciousness into worship, spiritual practice, and religious education programs of the congregation. Implement at least one additional activity or enhancement for current practice each year.
- Build on your experience with your Earth justice project. Continue implementation of the major environmental justice project you initiated for accreditation, maintaining and extending the partnerships you have developed. If your goal for that project has been achieved, begin a new project in your community or beyond.
- Maintain congregational membership in UU Ministry for Earth to help insure that Earth ministry can continue to deepen the commitment of Unitarian Universalists to building a just and sustainable world. We ask you to also consider being active the following ways:
 - Host a UUMFE membership awareness event once a year;
 - Connect with at least one other congregation in your District annually to encourage and support them in becoming a Green Sanctuary, perhaps by offering a workshop at your District conference, or serve as mentor to a nearby candidate congregation;
 - Submit contributions such as writings, unique projects, curricula developed, worship services, homilies, press coverage, etc. from your congregation for possible inclusion in UUMFE newsletters, e-news, web news, and new resources. An important part of your life as a Green Sanctuary is to share your stories and ideas so that Earth ministry begins to saturate UU congregational life across the country;
 - Be conscious of the need for volunteers and leaders in the national Earth ministry movement. Encourage and empower members of your congregation to deepen their involvement at the national level in the UU Ministry for Earth, and help us recruit members of your congregation who could represent UUMFE in your District.

To keep your Green Sanctuary status up-to-date, we ask you to submit an annual report summarizing your accomplishments for the year. This report is due to UUMFE on May 1 each year, to be compiled into our report for the UUA. Submit your report to: greensanctuary@uuministryforearth.org. As a minimum, that report will include the following:

- Update your Green Sanctuary contacts: Congregational name and updated contact information for the Green Sanctuary committee.
- Report on Goals and accomplishments. Provide a brief description of how you have furthered the Green Sanctuary program goals, including specific projects you have implemented as listed above.

- Ongoing and emerging issues and challenges. Briefly describe specific environmental issues that are emerging in your congregation or community, to suggest where UUMFE might plan to focus in the future. Indicate any problems or challenges you have encountered in maintaining your Green Sanctuary commitments.

Your report will be added to those of the other Green Sanctuary congregations (61 Green Sanctuaries at the time of this publication) to detail the ongoing Earth ministry of Unitarian Universalists. From this report, we will also select specific projects and accomplishments to highlight on our web site during the coming year. If you would like to assist us with compiling this collective report, please contact the Green Sanctuary Program Coordinator.

Seeing the Future

Over time you will no longer think about your Green Sanctuary work as another project that must be completed. Your Earth consciousness will be fully integrated into congregational life. It will influence all decisions, whether or not the Green Sanctuary activists are present for the conversation. Program leaders may move on to provide leadership to other aspects of congregational life, and they will bring their Earth wisdom and experience with them into these new arenas. Soon you will look around you on Sunday morning, or at some special event, and realize how much has changed since you began this journey. You will feel joy in the moment for your role in that change. You will feel hope because you know it is possible to create the future you dream of instead of acquiescing to what others tried to dictate for their own benefit.

Our Unitarian Universalist faith enriches our lives in many ways, feeding us both intellectually and spiritually. With daily news reports of a global situation which often seem pretty grim, it's very easy to fall into fear, hopelessness, and despair. More than ever, we need to respond with compassion to the suffering in our world: Compassion for the Earth, which suffers at each new insult of greed, carelessness, and bad choices. Compassion for those communities that bear the brunt of the environmental damage. Compassion for ourselves, as we try our best to repair the world, and find we keep falling short of our own expectations. And especially, compassion for each other, as we feel grief and despair for Earth's gifts that are being lost.

Through the Green Sanctuary Program, we model Earth ministry, encouraging and facilitating our members to live in ways that are consistent with these values. We continue to work collectively to envision and work towards a future where ecological values are the guiding principles for all our relationships. Our congregation can be like a garden where the seeds of a just and sustainable future are planted and nurtured, where the invasive species of self- and planet-destroying consumerism, oppression, and violence are rooted out and recycled into nutrients for a life-sustaining "Earth Community" which we can create together.

May our gardens continue to blossom, nourishing our spirits and healing our world!

Acknowledgments

IT HAS BEEN MORE THAN FOUR YEARS since the Third Edition of the Green Sanctuary Manual was produced. That version was based on only about two years of experience with the program, and we were all learning together.

In the time since then, the number of congregations formally enrolled in the program has skyrocketed from 29 to 135, providing many more examples and experiences from which to learn what works and what is most needed to be successful in the program. In creating this fourth edition of the Green Sanctuary Manual I have been blessed by the experiences of leaders and activists in all of those congregations, along with the dozens and dozens of congregations not yet enrolled. The questions raised by these participants—and the challenges they've struggled with—have taught me a lot. I have learned much from the struggles and successes each has shared with me, and the questions that come up, either occasionally or consistently, when a congregation decides to take up the call to Earth ministry. I have taken the liberty to include many ideas and experiences of Green Sanctuary committees to illustrate aspects of the program. Sometimes these are directly from a congregation with attribution. More often, I have adapted the stories to make a specific point, or consolidated two or three ideas into a single suggestion, in which case a particular source is not indicated. I have benefitted greatly by your experiences and thank you for sharing your stories with me. The photos used in this document were submitted by congregations for our General Assembly programs over the last few years. They illustrate UUs in action to repair the world.

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In addition to the experience of Green Sanctuary activists in the congregations, I want to acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Claudia Kern and Barbara Ford. They have both encouraged and supported the work of this project over many months of reading, analyzing, reviewing, writing, and rewriting. They have served as sounding boards and challengers, pushing as needed when I've gotten bogged down, and challenging me when the project seemed to lose momentum.

Claudia also offered her eagle eye for editing, reading every section, adding new language to clarify where needed, and red-lining more than one section when it was only repeating what had been said before. The result is, I hope, a much better and more useful product than I could have produced on my own. I am indeed grateful for Claudia's tenacity and attention to detail, along with her good humor and grace when she felt it necessary to insist on changes. It seems the more we work and struggle together, the deeper our friendship grows.

This project also bears the imprint of one tireless volunteer who created the end product. Karen Holmgren, a member of the Palomar UU Fellowship in Vista, California, offered her services as a graphic artist to format the book, giving it a distinctive and attractive appearance. I hope this experience will be as useful to her as it has been to me in getting it ready

for distribution to all our constituents. Karen has been a pleasure to work with and I feel very fortunate she has joined our team.

With this final page completed, the electronic file will be sent to Irene Keim, our UUMFE Office Manager, to reproduce on CD and send to all those who have been waiting for their orders. With the support of her trusty assistant, Anne Virginia Clements, the Green Sanctuary Manual will soon arrive in the hands of aspiring Green Sanctuaries across the continent.

Now that this project is complete, I intend to turn attention to gathering specific stories from all of the accredited and candidate congregations to add to our web site so that everyone can know in detail what wonderful work is going on in congregations throughout the Unitarian Universalist Association. For it is in witnessing the work of healing the damage to the Earth from the way we live, and of making changes to minimize damage, and of deepening our relationships among ourselves, that I find hope for the future of our world. It is truly a blessing to be a part of creating the future we see in our dreams.

With hope for the Earth and blessings to all,

Rev. Katherine Jesch
Portland, Oregon
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