

## **CONGREGATIONAL VOTE**

The Annual Meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Asheville will be held Sunday, June 8, 2008. The congregation will consider the attached Resolution and Environmental Sustainability Policy during the meeting. Rev. Jesch and the Ministry for Earth will be officially advised of the action taken by the congregation as soon as possible.

See attachment: GS Resolution 6-'08 and UU Sustainability Policy.

## **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES / PROJECTS**

### **Worship, Spiritual Practice, and/or Church Community Celebration**

**1** - Since the acceptance of our church as a Green Sanctuary Candidate in January 2005, our Minister Mark Ward and the Worship Committee has planned and presented an Annual Earth Day Sunday Service. The program is an intergenerational service with a story for the younger children, music, readings and a sermon emphasizing our 7<sup>th</sup> Principle. The service is in the spring and the sanctuary is alive with flowers and plants native to our mountains. The congregation is encouraged to participate in other community activities and community celebrations following the service.

This annual event has become a much-anticipated service with participation by many of the church standing committees and groups within the congregation.

The outcome realized from these programs/services over the past four years has been a clarification of our 7<sup>th</sup> Principle to members and friends in our congregation and a reminder of our individual and congregational responsibility and opportunity to “live” our 7<sup>th</sup> Principle.

**2** - The Worship Committee is responsible for programs and speakers for Sunday services when our minister is out of the pulpit. The topics, as often as possible, deal with the environment, sustainability, peace and social justice issues. Speakers are selected from our local Colleges and Universities, local non-profit organizations and retired individuals with experience and expertise in current local, national and global issues.

The most recent service sponsored by the Peace and Social Justice and the Green Sanctuary Committee was Sunday, April 13, 2008. Committee members selected and presented the readings that preceded an outstanding “sermon”/presentation by Dr. Dee Eggers, Professor of Environmental Science at the University of North Carolina at Asheville and currently serving on the NC Commission on Global Warming. Several church members said, “this was one of the best services of the year”.

## 2.

These special services provide an opportunity to present information, concepts and ideas that support our Green Sanctuary Program and stimulate more conversation and interest in our environment and sustainable living. An additional outcome is increased participation in the related Adult Education programs offered.

### **Religious Education Youth**

**1** - The RE Committee is and has been very supportive of our Green Sanctuary program adding new books and reference material to the library and adding, for use in our RE programs, UUA curricula with emphasis on the “green” sections. The curricula used during the 2007-2008 church year is as follows:

K- 4<sup>th</sup> grade - “In Our Hands” guidebook dealing with environmental and social justice issues appropriate for the age and grade levels.

5<sup>th</sup> grade - “Material World” guidebook dealing primarily with social justice issues.

6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grade - Gender specific classes dealing with social justice implications of sustainable living to provide food, shelter, health care for all. An overnight retreat was held this year at the YMCA Environmental Center.

8<sup>th</sup> grade - “Gospel of the Simpsons” guidebook provides ideas for discussion of environmental issues.

9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> - “Coming of Age” this group selects relevant issues for discussion and quite often selects the environment and global warming issues.

**2** - All classes participate in recycling programs to increase their awareness of the need to recycle or properly dispose of non-recyclable items. The encouragement of parents and friends to recycle is an important component of this program. Another part of the program is to save materials for reuse in arts and crafts projects.

**3** - A program to reinforce the “Reuse or Recycle” concept is our Annual Church Toy Resale in the late fall. Great for parents, fun for kids and a good fundraiser for RE.

The outcome of these RE programs, projects and activities for our youth is the creation of a generation of young people more aware of their personal and collective responsibilities for the protection of the environment and sustainable living for all creatures. These kids “get it”.

### **Adult Education**

The Environmental Section of the church library has been expanded with the addition of several new publications and study guides.

**1** - During the '06-'07 church year three Northwest Earth Institute course discussion groups, one using the "Choices in Sustainable Living" material and two using the "Voluntary Simplicity" material were organized and facilitated with 68 people participating.

Three "pot luck" dinners were organized and facilitated to discuss a peace making study and environmental justice issues.

**2** - During the '07-'08 church year another three Northwest Earth Institute course discussion groups, two using the "Voluntary Simplicity" and the "Global Warming: Changing CO2urse" material and one using "the Work that Connects" material were organized and facilitated.

**3** - One Friday evening a month, films are shown at the church with peace and environmental justice themes. A recent film "What a Way to Go" was shown with 150 attending. This program is publicized as open to the public and a number of environmental groups attend.

The outcome of these programs is the education of our members and friends of the most recent thought and information on environmental issues, technology, action, and organizations advocating for changing current policies that are destroying our ecosystems. We are also attracting many "like minded" individuals to our church facility and introducing them to Unitarian Universalism.

### **Environmental Justice**

**1** - The UU Church of Asheville has provided meeting space and supported "Physicians for Social Responsibility", a non-profit organization dedicated to advocating for peace and environmental justice locally, nationally and globally for many years. We have collaborated with them on several letter writing and petition circulation projects to call attention to inequities in fair housing, health care and equal opportunity employment issues.

We supported efforts by Physicians for Social Responsibilities in providing a low cost wellness clinic here in Asheville sponsored by Asheville-Buncombe Community Christian Ministry, another local non-profit. This Clinic continues to operate in a low-wealth community.

**2** - The UU Church of Asheville collaborated with other local non-profit organizations in distributing several hundred donated CFL bulbs from a float during the 2006 Christmas parade. Our church also donated 100 CFL bulbs to our local chapter of the NAACP for distribution to low-wealth families in our community.

**3** – In addition to creating a Social Action bulletin board in Sandburg Hall, the Social Action Committee and the Coffee Committee replaced the traditional coffee used for Coffee Hour and other church functions with shade grown, organic, fair trade coffee.

The same coffee and fair trade chocolate is sold during coffee hour as a fundraiser for other Social Action projects. This program and the printed material available from the initiators of the program has increased the awareness of our members and friends of the need to buy responsibly from businesses that practice fair trade policies.

**4** - In 2005, “Progress Energy”, the electric utility company that is franchised to provide electric service to the majority of our community, quietly negotiated a deal to lease public property from the County to build the Woodfin Power Plant, a coal fired auxiliary power plant near a small township near Asheville. Several environmental and socially responsible groups opposed the location, the fuel proposed and the commitment of public property without public input. Another issue was the accuracy of the “projected demand for service” that justified the need for an additional power plant versus conservation.

Our Green Sanctuary Committee joined with the Canary Coalition and many other concerned organizations and community groups to petition the local governments, the State Utilities Commission and other regulating agencies having review responsibilities over the proposed project and Project Energy to reconsider the project.

Following many public hearings, letters, petitions and pending litigation by the Canary Coalition and others, in late 2007, Progress Energy advised the County of its intent to cancel the lease for the property. This was indeed a long and hard won victory for our community, our environment and environmental justice. Our contributions to this achievement are recognized in our community.

### **Sustainable Living and Energy Conservation**

Upon completion of our Environmental Assessment, inventory and energy audit the development of projects for our Action Plan for sustainable living and energy conservation was obvious. The following are activities/projects that have been completed or are continuing activities:

**1** – Replacement of standard incandescent lamps with energy efficient compact fluorescent lamps throughout the church. This effort began with the exterior lights, Sandburg Hall, administrative offices and classroom spaces based on amount of use.

This project continues to increase our energy savings with the addition of motion sensing light switches in the toilets and other closed spaces where lights are often not turned off. The technology is advancing rapidly in this area and many members of the church are monitoring the availability of new products that will benefit us.

**2** – Our HVAC system was replaced in 2003 with an energy efficient system at that time. To insure peak performance and efficiency from the system, access to the thermostat controls is limited to staff and volunteers with knowledge of the systems. There are three zones with thermostats to achieve efficiency and energy savings while maintaining comfort levels.

A contract for ongoing routine and preventative maintenance is in place to insure maximum efficiency, regular service and “continuing education” for the operation of the systems as “we forget” or add new volunteers and staff members.

**3** – Accessibility, we feel, is a part of sustainable living and we have made the following changes, modifications and replacements for accessibility and resource conservation:

- The addition of more usable handrails in the sanctuary.
- Modification of the entrance to the sanctuary from the foyer and the improvement of the handrails.
- Replacement of toilet fixtures with higher, accessible, water saving fixtures.
- A commitment to making reasonable accommodations for persons with special needs and consideration of accessibility in the planning of any improvements or repairs to the church campus.

**4** – Last year, the thirty five year old cedar shake roof on the sanctuary needed replacing. The initial recommendation from the Building and Grounds Committee was to replace the roof with asphalt/fiberglass shingles, for cost considerations. The Green Sanctuary Committee was asked to participate in the review of the recommendation.

The final recommendation, by consensus, approved by the Board, was to have the old cedar shakes removed and recycled and “Enviroshakes”, a product made from recycled material resembling cedar shakes with a 35 + year warranty and minimal ongoing maintenance, installed.

**5** – Our initial “Action Plan” item for sustainable living was the replacement of Styrofoam disposal dinnerware with paper products. This was accomplished in early 2005.

Since that time we have made the following changes:

- Switched from Styrofoam coffee cups to washable ceramic coffee mugs.
- Switched from paper plates and bowls to washable plates and bowls.
- Switched from plastic spoons, forks and knives to washable utensils.
- Switched from disposable paper napkins to washable cloth napkins.

These items were purchased by the Women's and Men's Breakfast Groups and the Social Action Committee from their fund raising projects. These new items are washed in our energy efficient, fast cycle dishwasher.

**6** – Several seasonal Saturday “Work Days” usually dedicated to the routine cleaning and maintenance of the campus grounds included the removal of non-indigenous invasive plants and vegetation and replaced with locally grown plants and shrubs indigenous to our mountains.

**7** - Another “Work Day” project was the removal and proper disposal of 40 cans of used paint and thinners and multiple containers of unsafe herbicides, insecticides and cleaning materials. Our County Land Fill has special days for receiving these materials for proper disposal. Over the years we had accumulated almost three pickup truck loads. Good riddance!

**8** – The Peace and Environmental Justice Committee and the Green Sanctuary Committee collaborated this year on the sale of green reusable shopping bags that fold into them selves for easy carry in a pocket, purse or conveniently in the car. Carrying your “stuff” in one of the “green bags” is a cool thing to do and has been a good fundraiser. The bags were ordered through Chicos and have our Unitarian Universalist Church of Asheville name and logo printed on the side. (Let us know if you want one...or more!)

This concludes our submission of projects and activities in support of our Action Plan approved in January 2005. Although twelve activities are requested for consideration, we are submitting twenty because of the time lapse between approval of our plan and this submission.

Your consideration and approval of these activities /projects is requested. If there are questions or if additional information is needed, please do not hesitate to call.

### **ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PROGRAM GOALS**

Our Green Sanctuary Committee consists of a small Steering Group that can meet quickly and “in a car” to facilitate making recommendations to other committees and decision making bodies. Other Standing Committee and many Ad Hoc Committee Chairs, or a designated representative, are considered a part of the Green Sanctuary Committee and are consulted on issues and questions regarding their specific areas of responsibility.

This membership structure provides Green Sanctuary representation and input on all Standing and Ad Hoc Committees. This representation helps to build awareness or at least provide exposure to all leadership positions of the environmental issues facing us personally, locally and globally.

The RE programs for our young people and Adult Education programs are generating conversations and discussions about what we need to be doing to address the environmental and sustainability issues being identified.

In our recent Sunday Service recognizing our graduating high school seniors from the Coming of Age Group, one of the students, speaking of what he would take with him as he moves on to the next phase of his life, said his understanding of the importance and his commitment to the “three R’s”. He said these are “Reduce”, “Reuse” and “Recycle”. As stated previously, these kids get it!

At the conclusion of our Sunday Service April 13, 2008, those attending the services (9:15 and 11:15) were requested to review the insert in the order of service that identified 20 simple actions one could take personally to make a difference. They were asked to check the items they were currently doing and those they were willing to make a commitment to do and place the insert in a basket in Sandburg Hall. The response was most encouraging. Our congregation is beginning to get it.

Our church is very supportive of community action activities and provides meeting space for organized groups like the Physicians for Social Responsibility, the Sierra Club, WNC Peace Coalition, Sustainable Asheville and the Building Bridges Program, a diversity understanding and appreciation program dealing with racial and ethnic diversity issues. Meeting space has been provided to individuals and neighborhood groups interested in organizing to address relevant social and environmental issues in our community. Many of our members belong to these groups or serve as sponsors or hosts for the meetings.

Our minister, Rev. Mark Ward is supportive of the Green Sanctuary Program and has presented several sermons on our 7<sup>th</sup> Principle. The readings and meditations often provide the opportunity for one to make a personal connection between their spiritual practice and environmental issues. Many of us make this connection, which leads to interesting conversations during coffee hour.

A special electronic newsletter called “The Flame” is available on request to members and friends to convey information about social justice and environmental issues. It provides a calendar with education, social and volunteer opportunities and a forum for relevant topics. The Flame, the Green Sanctuary web site and the bulletin board in Sandburg Hall provide information and opportunities to address ones concerns or have questions answered.

## **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

I feel the most important congregational benefit gained by participating in the Green Sanctuary Program is awareness. In a word, awareness!

Very few of our members are “native” to Asheville and Western North Carolina. My response to the question, “are you from here originally” is no, I am here by choice, not by accident of birth. Most of us came here as a result of employment and decided to stay. Others read the books on “Best Places...” and discovered what a great place this is to live.

We have taken clean air, abundant clean water from our high mountain watershed, our four distinct season moderate climate and the rich cultural diversity in our community for granted. It happens so gradually that we do not see or ignore the changes in the weather, the haze in the sky, the loss of our high mountain evergreens and other native vegetation, the irresponsible construction methods of greedy developers, the need for more and more energy consumption, increased congestion on our streets and highways, more litter, the reduction of affordable “workforce” housing and the polarization of our diverse community.

Participation in the Green Sanctuary Program, preparing the application and action plan increased the awareness of a few initially but has grown to the point that environmental issues and sustainability are topics of discussion on a regular basis. The support from the pulpit, our website, the bulletin board and the newsletter announcing meetings, current issues and opportunities to do something has increased awareness.

The most challenging aspect of the program has been a reluctance to make the decision to “officially” commit to the program. In 2004 the Board approved the establishment of a Green Sanctuary Committee and submission of the application for Green Sanctuary Candidacy. The Committee of very dedicated and energetic people set about the task and made great progress along with recruitment of others to the effort.

When the time came to make policy decisions, it was determined that more review and discussion was needed. “We need to refer the matter to other Committees for review”. What are the short term and long term financial implications?” What is the joke about UU’s being more interested in discussing the existence of Heaven than going?...

Well, we have finally made it. The congregation is supportive and will make the commitment June 8<sup>th</sup>.

Our congregation’s culture change is evident in the conversations regarding carpooling and setting times and places for meetings to maximize trip efficiency. The increase in participation in programs and discussions is a clear indication of interest and concern. One of the examples of a culture change I observed was listening to a member explain to a visitor during Coffee Hour, with pride, why we use washable mugs, plates and cloth napkins.

Another example of change on the part of our congregation is the number of articles, information and notices of events related to the environment we receive from members interested in keeping us up to date on new ideas and best practices for consideration.

The approval of the submission of this Application for Green Sanctuary Accreditation and adoption of the Environmental Sustainability Policy by the congregation will be a clear message to the Board and administration of our desire and intent to continue our efforts to “Reduce, Reuse and Recycle” whenever possible in all areas of church activities. Our efforts to review, monitor and recommend ways to conserve and reduce our collective carbon footprint will be enhanced.

In a recent report on the status of the Green Sanctuary Program during a Sunday service the statement was made that being designated a Green Sanctuary by UUA is just the beginning of our task to find ways to live, to the best of our individual and collective abilities, our 7<sup>th</sup> Principle. We did not get an “Amen” from the congregation but a decent round of applause!

Our on-going role in taking the lead or supporting others relative to environmental and social justice issues in our community is clearly understood by a majority of the congregation and is an expectation of our partners in the greater community. The Green Sanctuary designation will substantiate our progress over the past three years and serve to inspire us all to continue these efforts.

As stated, I feel the most important benefit to our congregation resulting from our participation in the Green Sanctuary program thus far is awareness of the changes to our environment caused by each of us individually and collectively, locally and globally. We are becoming more aware of our responsibility to make personal changes and provide leadership and encouragement to others to become aware of her/his responsibilities.