

Green Congregation Award Churches - Level 1

June 15, 2012

Congregational Church of Weston

<http://www.congwestonucc.net/CCWIWEBSITE/AboutUs.html>

CCW has become increasingly engaged in environmental issues. Last spring we devoted all of Lent to our relationship with, and responsibilities to, God's creation. The congregation participated in the Lenten Carbon Fast, including a sermon on the carbon fast as a spiritual discipline and life habit. The sermon topics for Lent were the 7 Deadly Sins, with our "sins" against the environment featured in many sermons. On Good Friday we created a vigil that showed the parallels between the crucifixion of Christ and the crucifixion of our environment. In addition we had a Lenten book study on *Hot, Flat and Crowded* by Tom Friedman. We challenged the children to "bug their parents" to implement green practices at home.

Our Environmental Task Force helped bring Bill McKibben to Weston for a community lecture and environmental forum. We sponsored a 350.org training session for environmental activists from Metro-West and participated in the May 5 "Connect the Dots" activities. The Task Force contributes to the church newsletter and gives announcements regularly to keep the congregation informed about ways to get involved in the community. The church's high school/intergenerational service project was to Brimfield to help clean up the devastation of last year's tornado.

The head of our Buildings and Grounds Committee is on the Environmental Task Force and we continuously work to make the church more energy efficient. We perform regular cleaning and maintenance on all church HVAC units, the water temperature is set at 120 and we recycle paper, glass and plastic. Office and kitchen appliances are on power strips, which are turned off or unplugged when not in use.

First Congregational Church of Shrewsbury

<http://www.fccsm.org/frameset.html>

Our Earth Stewardship Ministry was established in 2007 in response to growing concerns about climate change and other environmental issues, and the belief that environmental stewardship is necessary for the preservation of God's creation. The scope of our activities covers many different areas involved in environmental stewardship, including fostering green practices in our church buildings and within our congregation, providing educational opportunities related to environmental issues and sound environmental practices, and expanding the commitment of our church community to addressing environmental issues in our local community. Recent examples include installing LED bulbs in the church chandelier, hosting a talk by our State Representative Matt Beaton who built the first

certified Passive House in Massachusetts (in Shrewsbury), two Mass ReLeaf tree planting events, and creating a list of energy-saving Lenten sacrifices for children (visit www.fccsm.org for more information).

Our inspiration is as varied as our individual interests, and there is an element of serendipity involved. In one case, a casual visit to a campus art museum led to an entire series on mountaintop coal removal – the inspiration coming from an exhibit featuring photographs of desperate Appalachian coal towns.

We've all heard a lot lately about the “new normal” in reference to the greater frequency of severe weather. But, fostering a “Green Congregation” helps create a “new normal” of sustainable living throughout the community – and hopefully the world.

First Parish, Newbury

<http://www.firstparishofnewbury.org/mission/missionhome.htm>

<http://www.newedengarden.org/>

Our environmental ministry was born out of a year-long vision process in 2005. To celebrate, we gathered outside and encircled a small area that we imagined would become our first organic garden. We spent that winter beginning to recycle, switching our light bulbs, and installing a new furnace and energy efficient windows in the church hall.

Our mission has since grown to 42 organic community gardens with beehives, chickens, an earth oven, and an adult eco-education program. We call this the New Eden Collaborative. Gardeners sign a covenant to care for their gardens and the communal space, and to donate vegetables which we deliver to soup kitchens twice a week. We joined 350.org and host events every year to raise awareness.

Believing that children who are the most vulnerable to environmental degradation can become the most powerful advocates and ambassadors for the earth, we started a special needs ministry. An integrated Sunday School teaches biblical truths through hands-on gardening. Our students planted and tend a “Hope Garden” on the town green.

We had interior and exterior lead paint, asbestos and mold removed from our building, and in 2011 we opened Our Secret Garden indoor/outdoor Nursery and Preschool, which we envision as the seed of a full school focused on environmental stewardship.

Currently, we are working with a leading international scientist, Dr. Tom Goreau, on a small pilot project to restore part of the Great Salt Marsh.

First Congregational Church in Amherst, UCC

http://www.firstchuramherst.org/peace_justice.html

Members of First Church Amherst have been tending the connections between discipleship and creation care since the mid-1990s. In 2003 the congregation adopted an Earth

Covenant Resolution, saying, “We are called by God to be good stewards of Creation . . . for the sake of present and future generations. We promise to care for God's earth both within our faith community, and in our lives as individuals and families.”

The Earth Ministry Team has led the church in living out this covenant by engaging almost every facet of congregational life: facilitating adult-education classes and film-screenings, planning environmentally-themed worship services, managing a Styrofoam recycling center, installing a bicycle rack, planting trees, providing members with energy-saving tips and hands-on assistance, encouraging participation in Lenten Carbon Fasts, and planting an edible garden that feeds church members and soup kitchen guests. In 2010-11, the team provided technical support for the replacement of the church's oil-fired heating system, which has cut in half the church's carbon footprint.

Team members have also demonstrated that creation stewardship includes political action. In addition to leading the church in numerous 350.org activities, including 350 rings of the church bells, the team has provided meeting space and support to other environmental groups.

Grace Church, UCC, Framingham

<http://www.gracechurchucc.org/>

This spring, the Green Congregations Challenge has expanded our existing “green” commitments. Those started from the leadership of our kids and the Sunday School program. Their reminders to conserve water and energy show up in bulletin inserts, posters around the church, and the expectation that we'll all participate in workdays at a local organic farm.

With Edwards Church, UCC in Framingham we formed Earthcare. The mission of this project is to raise awareness about the biblical call to care for God's creation and to deepen our commitment to practices that help sustain and restore our environment. Earthcare kicked-off a 350.org event with a bell choir ringing their bells 350 times along a busy road in Framingham. We get other ideas from 350.org and from partnering with the local Sierra Club chapter.

In addition, we've held intergenerational local food cooking classes and planted trees through Mass ReLeaf. We have hosted numerous speakers including one “environmental comedian.” Movie nights (with popcorn popped on the cob) have included *Coal Country* and *No Impact Man*. We've sponsored book discussions on *Hot, Flat, and Crowded* by Thomas Friedman and *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle* by Barbara Kingsolver.

Unique to our congregation have been quarterly Styrofoam recycling drives which attract people from all over Massachusetts (next one is July 28).

These events draw people from outside of our congregation and into the wider community, so these actions inspired by faith become acts of evangelism as well.

Congregational Church in Needham

<http://needhamucc.org/connect/small-groups/>

Our environmental activities have included :

- Arranging through NSTAR to have insulation and CFL's installed in church.
- Installing 4 compost caddies in the kitchens, and a large outdoor composter. We collect and compost coffee grounds, plant material and food wastes.
- We encourage members to Walk/Bike to Church in October and May and to sign the Vision Statement for a Walkable America - promoting health, economic vitality, environmental sustainability, and social equity. We have installed a new bike rack.
- *Needham in Motion*: In May 2010, our church logged the highest number of walking and biking miles of any community group - 1400 miles!
- We offer "Climate Change Cafes" as an alternative to coffee hour 3 times a year. We've shown the films, *Renewal* and *The Story of Stuff*. We hosted a representative from Citizens Climate lobby and wrote letters to our representatives. We offered "Made in God's Image – Why our personal care choices matter," a discussion about beauty product choices.
- We participated in the Green Needham 10% Challenge. Approximately 45 families have signed up.
- We collect used cell phones to be recycled for Soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- On Earth Day we gave away packets of flower and lettuce seeds.
- We use Green Seal certified soap to reduce exposure to harmful chemicals in our church washrooms.
- We promoted signing up for a Home Mass Energy Audit.