

Application for Green Sanctuary Accreditation

Keene Unitarian Universalist Church



69 Washington Street

Keene NH 03431

www.keeneuuchurch.org

June 2009

Application for Green Sanctuary Accreditation

Keene Unitarian Universalist Church

69 Washington Street , Keene , NH 03431

www.KeeneUUChurch.org

Green Sanctuary Contacts:

2008-2009:

Suzanne Butcher

44 Felt Road , Keene , NH 03431

603-357-8383

ssbutcher@aol.com

and Betsy Zimmerli

49 Mayflower Dr. , Keene , NH 03431

603-357-4149

betsyzim@myfairpoint.net

2009-2010:

Ann Shedd

59 Greenwood Avenue

Keene , NH 03431

603-352-0720

ladyleafy@gmail.com

and

Jeff Staples

176 Gilsum Street

Keene , NH 03431

603-352-2531

staplesj@nortel.com

Minister:

Rev. Jane Thickstun

office@kuuc.org

CONGREGATIONAL VOTE

On June 21, 2009, in a congregational meeting, the members of KUUC adopted the following Covenant and voted to apply for accreditation as a Green Sanctuary.

Keene Unitarian Universalist Church

GREEN SANCTUARY COVENANT

WE THE MEMBERS OF KEENE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH ,

- Recognizing the fragile and interdependent state of our Earth and all living things;
- Recognizing the need to protect and maintain the quality of our common life-giving natural resources such as water, soil, and air;
- Recognizing the need to join with others to bring forth a sustainable society based on respect for our planet and all its life-giving resources; and
- Recognizing our universal human rights to a clean environment:

DO THEREFORE DECLARE

To one another, to the greater community of life, and to future generations, our acceptance of responsibility for preserving and protecting the health, vitality, beauty, and diversity of this planet Earth.

TO THIS END

As members of the Keene Unitarian Universalist Church and participants in the Green Sanctuary Program, we pledge our encouragement to one another in a personal and congregational commitment to living this promise through our Unitarian Universalist Principles, including the Seventh Principle, “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” In addition to specific projects and activities, we make the following commitments:

- We incorporate Seventh Principle values and practices into our worship services, celebrations and religious education programs;
- We live lightly on the Earth and strive to continually improve our environmental impact; and
- We affirm and promote programs to raise the awareness of human behaviors that affect the health and sustainability of the living Earth.

COMPLETION OF PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Describe the 12 projects or program activities your congregation has accomplished: What action was taken? What specific outcomes have resulted from the action? Each project description should be no more than half a page.

Many individuals and many groups throughout the KUUC congregation have participated in activities reflecting our Green Sanctuary commitment. We completed most of the activities listed in our application for candidacy, dropped some, and added others.

Worship and Celebration:

Lay-Led Services

On October 7, 2007, and September 28, 2008, the Green Sanctuary Committee led the Sunday services. KUUC members Sarah Harpster (Environmental Studies graduate student) and Peter Allen (forester and state representative) gave the homily in 2007 and 2008, respectively. The committee involved many "Green Team" members in these services. Opening words reflected on our mission, and music, meditation, and readings were all connected to our natural environment. These services were well attended and well received.

Minister-Led Services

Our ministers frequently weave ecological themes into Sunday services and, in particular, focus a service around Earth Day on environmental concerns. Our new settled minister, Rev. Jane Thickstun, offered sermons in April 2009 on "Deep Ecology" and "Celebrating Earth Day." Last year, interim minister Rev. Olivia Holmes spoke on "Nature's Inconvenient Truths and Blessings." Our RE Director, a wonderful storyteller, often selects thought-provoking stories advancing the Seventh Principle for the Story for All Ages segments of Sunday services. "Magic Water" valued lifestyle simplicity; "Modern Midas" talked about gratitude for what one has and the risks of greed; in "Lessons from the Sneetches," the congregation learned that the good deeds of Sneetches might include switching to compact fluorescent light bulbs; "Five Wise Ones and an Elephant" talked about being a part of a larger whole; "Oba's People and the Sky" talked about caring for the planet, the source of many of our gifts; and "The Lorax and Ms. Maathai" reflected on how individual acts can protect our common environment.

Children's Chapel

Several of the Children's Chapel services also supported the Green Sanctuary message. These included the "Question of Quests," with a lesson on caring about something deeply and following it with passion and respect for all people and the interdependent web; and "The Butterfly Effect," noting the fact that small actions can yield far reaching effects.

Religious Education:

Curriculum

The Religious Education program for children and youth is committed to supporting KUUC's goal of achieving Green Sanctuary status as a way of living our UU values in

our lives and in the world. The RE program has explored green principles through group activities that touched all of the members of the RE program in recent years. Examples include a Heifer Day project, which emphasized the importance of animals in people's lives; "The Great Fuzz Frenzy," in which members reflected on having too much, not enough, and just enough; "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle," a November 2007 project where our young people made art of reused items; and "Building the Interdependent Web," a story and discussion activity to understand the Seventh Principle. On Earth Sunday 2009, the students brainstormed simple changes they could make in their daily lives to help the earth; they carried home "trees" made of newspaper with leaves on which they wrote their intentions – hopefully to be put up at home as a reminder to themselves and motivation for parents to do the same. Our RE Director wrote, "Incidentally, our children and youth are amazingly environmentally literate!"

The curriculum for Grades 1 and 2 specifically explores the Web of Life, but all classes touch on this throughout the year. Each RE class in some way over the course of the year attends to our Seventh Principle. As an example, our youngest class (pre-K/K) donned gloves and walked around the neighborhood of our church collecting trash.

Materials

The Sunday morning RE Program has instituted a church-school wide snack, in place of providing snack for each classroom separately. This has wasted less food. We have also replaced paper cups and napkins with reusable plastic cups and cloth napkins, saving us an average of about 40 paper cups and napkins each week. This means that in the last two years we have removed 1,440 cups and napkins from our waste stream!

When the Nursery Program needed new toys, instead of purchasing new materials, we asked congregants to recycle the gently used toys and books their children had outgrown.

Heifer International

Our children and youth voted to support Heifer International. One class sold Rainforest Chocolates that support sustainable agricultural practices in Costa Rica, while another sold non-genetically-modified flower and vegetable seeds. In addition to raising \$3,000 for Heifer, the students held Group Activities that focused on global hunger and equitable distribution of resources. Twenty RE members visited Heifer's Overlook Farm to learn more about sustainable animal husbandry.

Youth Group

Members of our Youth Group participated in the congregational Work Sunday to improve the energy efficiency of our church. The downstairs room where the group meets on Sunday evenings is chilly, especially since we have reduced heating in the building. A member of the youth group commented, "We use blankets instead of raising the heat!"

Children and Youth

At the June 8, 2008 Child and Youth Annual Meeting, the children and youth passed the following resolution: “Gathered together as children and teens of the Keene Unitarian Universalist Church, we are aware that the Earth needs all our help, and that it is our responsibility under our 7th Principle to care for the Earth and its resources, and so be it resolved, that we give our support to the KUUC Green Sanctuary Committee and we pledge to do our part to help KUUC Reduce, Reuse and Recycle.”

Adult RE

In winter of 2008, a member of our congregation initiated and organized arrangements to offer the Northwest Earth Institute’s Voluntary Simplicity course at KUUC , open both to KUUC members and to others. So many people responded, we broke into three self-facilitating groups, a total of 26 participants, meeting over eight weeks. In March-April 2009, ten participants followed the NWEI curriculum on Sustainable Living at KUUC , while another group was hosted by another organization in town.

Environmental Justice:

Toxics

Those who are charged with using cleaning products daily are affected by the use of harmful chemicals. Those persons are often representatives of marginalized groups of people in our community and are not able to choose the materials they work with. In considering our commitment to Green Sanctuary, we recognized the need to seek justice by ensuring that our own janitors (who have developmental disabilities) are provided products that are safe for their health and for the environment. We cleaned out a closet of many old, toxic cleaning supplies and purchased safer materials. This was a focus of our inter-church workshop (see below), and Rev. Jane distributed information at a Keene interministerial meeting to encourage other congregations to take similar steps to care for our people and our environment. We published a “Green Corner” item in our church newsletter to encourage congregation members who employ cleaners in their homes or businesses to provide non-toxic cleaning supplies.

StayWarmNH

Eight members of KUUC worked with StayWarmNH, a statewide program, and our local Community Action Program to help weatherize low-income homes, to help elders and others stay safe and warm. This will reduce carbon emissions while helping those in our community who are least able to cope with high fuel prices. In going into people’s homes, we tried to meet the needs of individuals and provide them educational materials, while sensitively respecting their privacy and lifestyle choices.

Carpooling

We created a carpool map to encourage ridesharing not only to church services and activities but also to other places. We encourage carpooling to our annual weekend at

Ferry Beach in Maine and other outings. The Circle of Caring used this map to respond to requests for rides to church. Our aim is not only resource saving; we want to provide greater mobility for those who do not have a car, do not drive, or do not drive at night.

Heifer International (See above under Religious Education.)

Sustainable Living:

Energy Audit

In order to identify opportunities for saving energy, we hired an engineer to conduct an energy audit. The resulting report focused our attention on specific steps we could take, including several low cost strategies that served as a guide for work done during the Congregational Work Sunday. Other work is being done as time and money permit.

Lighting

We upgraded our lighting fixtures to energy efficient T8 lamps and upgraded our exit signs to LED lamps. We also installed CFLs in chandelier fixtures in our Sanctuary. We continue to work to identify and budget for opportunities to save electricity, such as by installing motion sensor switches and CFL lamps in fixtures that are on dimmers.

This Old House of Worship

Six KUUC members participated with representatives of five other local congregations in "This Old House of Worship" (www.wilsoned.com/Genesis), a 15-hour series of work-shops over five weeks to learn nuts-and-bolts steps to reduce the carbon footprint of our churches.

Heating

We set controls so that the burner only runs when heat is needed in our buildings and installed programmable thermostats to lower the temperature in unoccupied building areas. When spaces are occupied we have lowered the temperature from 70F to 65F. We installed insulation on heating pipes and weather stripping on doors. Ceiling fans are running 24/7 in the heating season to better equalize temperatures and reduce fuel usage, and curtains are drawn. Our fuel consumption is reduced by 34% per degree day!

Congregational Work Sunday

On October 19, 2008, members came to Sunday service in work clothes. We explored the concept of work as worship in our service, then over forty people stayed to work several hours cleaning radiators, insulating pipes, moving RE materials, and weather-stripping our beloved old building, all in an effort to reduce our energy use. Workers then shared a meal, with soups containing local products. Many hands made light work and good fellowship - and also made lower fuel bills and a smaller carbon footprint.

Home Energy Workshop

We held two evening sessions on “Energy conservation: personal and planetary perspectives.” A small group exchanged ideas from their experience in working on energy issues in their homes. It was a useful exchange of knowledge and support.

Keene 10% Challenge

KUUC was the first church to join local businesses in committing to the “Keene 10% Challenge,” a voluntary program to help businesses reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least ten percent (KeeneChallenge.org). We are already going far beyond 10%, but thought participating would be a good way to spread the word about what we are doing and to encourage others in our community. Our success was highlighted in a news article about the Keene 10% Challenge. The project is a partnership between Local Governments for Sustainability, Clean Air-Cool Planet, and Keene’s Cities for Climate Protection Committee.

Green Corner

Every month, a “Green Corner” item in KUUC’s newsletter provides concrete ideas to help individuals and families live more sustainably, with topics ranging from tire pressure to organic chocolate to Energy Star products. (To see the newsletters, click on “About Us” on KeeneUChurch.org.)

Inter-Church Workshop

In March 2008, the Green Sanctuary Committee hosted a workshop/information exchange attended by representatives of five other congregations. We also had attendees who had read about the event in the newspaper and had no stated church affiliation. The topics for discussion were: buildings and grounds, focused on energy reduction and toxic chemical use; worship; religious education; recycling; and environmental justice.

Procurement – Curtains from Curtains

As reported in our application for candidacy, the KUUC Board adopted a procurement policy in November 2007 to require consideration of the "cradle to grave" impact of goods and services we purchase. We will reduce, reuse, and buy green.

A delightful example of implementing this policy was the creation of curtains for the RE/Montessori wing reusing fabric from the Keene’s grand Colonial Theater. The heavy velvet curtains insulate and save energy.

Recycling and Compost

KUUC had a weekly pickup of an often-overflowing 4-cubic-yard dumpster of general trash and a single underutilized outdoor bin for recyclables. Staff in the church offices,

and in the office and classrooms of the Montessori School , were approached and were eager to improve their recycling practices. Two large recycling bins (one for paper and one for glass/plastic/metal) were placed in a central indoor corridor. Point-of-use recycling boxes were placed in meeting spaces, and prominent signs were posted. Notices about the new recycling procedures were posted in the KUUC newsletter and in the Sunday announcements.

Trash pickup is now every other week (reducing trash truck trips), with a 6-cubic-yard dumpster (i.e., trash is down at least one cubic yard per week, 25%). There is alternating pickup of either paper or glass/plastic/metal recyclables. A member of the congregation takes our corrugated cardboard to the city's recycling center.

In addition, a compost bin was erected in the churchyard for materials from the kitchen, the churchyard, and the AIDS Memorial Garden . Our first batch of finished compost is ready for use in the garden.

Grounds

The grounds subcommittee of the property committee is committed to planting native plants on KUUC grounds and in the gardens as much as possible. We worked with a representative of the Montessori school housed in the KUUC building about planting a tree dedicated to one of their teachers and planted a native tree suitable for the location and purpose. They have also consulted the property committee on appropriate perennials to be planted in the spring around the schools sign on the front lawn of KUUC .

The property committee is looking into installing rain barrels along the south wall of the main building. The water collected in the barrels will be directed through soaker hoses to water the AIDS memorial garden and gardens planned to line the pathway to the AIDS garden. This will also redirect roof water runoff that is now causing erosion on the south yard.

Water

We tabled at coffee hour on two occasions to facilitate community culture shift away from disposable water bottles to re-usable bottles and tap water. Stainless steel water bottles, made available at a reduced cost, were eagerly purchased.

ACCOMPLISHMENT OF PROGRAM GOALS

In a two or three page narrative, describe the degree to which you have achieved the five Green Sanctuary Program goals with your program:

- *To build awareness of societal environmental issues among UU's.*
- *To generate commitment for personal lifestyle changes.*
- *To motivate UU's to community action on environmental issues.*
- *To build a connection between spiritual practice and environmental consciousness.*

- *To build awareness of and rectify environmental injustices.*

- o To build awareness of societal environmental issues among UU's.*

When we did our KUUC self-assessment in the spring and summer of 2007 to begin the Green Sanctuary process, we concluded that our congregation was “composed, for the most part, of people concerned with making the world a better place, for both humans and for the Earth itself” and that “we honor the Seventh Principle, are aware of the fragile nature of our environment and are already taking steps to help preserve it,” but “we have many opportunities to make ourselves more ‘green-friendly.’” Our participation in the Green Sanctuary Program has done just that. We have more consciously brought an environmental perspective to our worship services, our Religious Education, our social action, and the operation of our building and grounds.

The response among the congregation has been broad and enthusiastic. As part of a visioning process in October 2007, participants were asked to vote on their highest priorities for KUUC goals. Becoming a Green Sanctuary congregation received the highest number of votes! Our broad range of activities built on this enthusiasm to raise awareness and encourage action.

- o To generate commitment for personal lifestyle changes.*

Many of our activities have affected not only our church building but also the lifestyles of our members. Early in the Green Sanctuary process, one active church member commented at coffee hour that she felt at a loss to know what specifically she could do in her own life and her own home. A year or so later, she expressed appreciation for the “Green Corner” tips in the KUUC newsletter that raise awareness of various issues and provide practical suggestions for individual action.

The Voluntary Simplicity and Sustainable Living courses provided opportunities to explore how our lives might be enriched by the practice of more simplicity and more conscious application of sustainability principles. Our home energy workshops focused specifically on home energy conservation. Other activities focused on the church building, such as the Congregational Work Sunday and the This Old House of Worship series, but they also led many of us to think about how we could apply similar steps at home.

- o To motivate UU's to community action on environmental issues.*

We are lucky to live in an earth-friendly region. (Keene is an active member of Cities for Climate Protection and Local Governments for Sustainability, and we are surrounded by natural beauty.) Keene UU's participate actively in our community as a congregation and as individuals. The Green Sanctuary program has provided additional opportunities and encouragement for such activism. For example, KUUC members participate in educational activities around Earth Day, spearheaded by the environment program at Antioch University New England. For the past three years we have had a Green

Sanctuary table at EarthFest, to provide information about what we are doing and encourage others to undertake similar action. A KUUC member, who has been active in the community in encouraging individual action to promote peace, spoke at a climate change rally on Central Square, again on the importance of individual action. We worked with our region's Community Action Program to weatherize homes of needy neighbors.

o To build a connection between spiritual practice and environmental consciousness.

Our worship services encourage environmental consciousness. This is particularly true, of course, in the focused services in the fall led by Green Sanctuary committee members and in the spring around Earth Day. But also throughout the year, stories, readings, music, and other elements of our services call us to mindfulness.

In addition, the Voluntary Simplicity program brought many of us together to reflect on deeper meanings. The readings provided food for individual contemplation and for thoughtful discussion. Each weekly session was opened by a different member with a poem or reading.

o To build awareness of and rectify environmental injustices.

We have worked hard to reduce our carbon footprint because climate change is an environmental injustice for future generations, with the greatest impact on those who are living in poverty. More directly addressing justice impacts for our lower-income neighbors, we have gone into private homes to provide information and practical assistance to reduce energy usage (e.g., weather stripping). As fuel oil prices skyrocketed, it made sense not simply to donate to fuel assistance (which we also did as individuals and as a congregation) but to provide weatherization to help our neighbors reduce their need for fuel oil.

Most of us are quite aware of climate change and our society's oil addiction. But until we began the Green Sanctuary program, most of us had not thought much about the impact of toxic chemicals. The program has certainly built our awareness. As the "Green Corner" item in the KUUC newsletter said, "many people are still exposed at their workplace because they are without political power." These include people working in agriculture, cleaning occupations, and beauty shops. We purchased safer products in order to protect the two men who clean our church, and worked to spread awareness and encourage action by other congregations and by the members of our congregation.

PROGRAM 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?*

Environmental awareness has been a part of KUUC's congregational life for many

years. KUUC 's ministers, RE Director and lay leaders weave environmental themes into many services and RE activities, keeping us mindful of the interdependent web of life. We switched over to fair trade coffee and ceramic mugs years ago. We had a recycle bin. It would be easy to think we were already pretty "green."

But the Green Sanctuary process has helped us to become much more intentionally focused on living the Seventh Principle. This has been the most important benefit of the Green Sanctuary Program. It has spurred both consciousness and concrete actions.

We have had strong support from our ministers (we have had three ministers since we began the Green Sanctuary program – outgoing, interim and incoming). But our Green Sanctuary process is not minister-led; its essence is enthusiastic participation by a broad range of individuals and groups throughout the congregation. Green Sanctuary has become an integral part of our congregational life, reflected in activities and decisions large and small.

An example: The Montessori school wanted to plant a rather large commemorative shade tree. A representative of the school checked with the chair of the KUUC property committee, who is an active participant in Green Sanctuary. He in turn consulted with another member who is active in Green Sanctuary and is knowledgeable about native plants. Based on her advice, the school chose a different variety of tree that is better adapted to our area. We have the awareness, the expertise, the willingness, and the communication that make this sort of thing happen.

- *What has been the most difficult or challenging aspect of the program for your congregation to achieve?*

The most challenging part of the Green Sanctuary program has been identifying environmental justice activities with meaningful, direct connections to disadvantaged individuals, as required by the program. Many members of our congregation are active in social justice and peace issues. Members work at our Community Kitchen (which our congregation helped found years ago) and participate in many other community activities to assist those in need. But those activities do not have a clear environmental focus. At the same time, we are strongly committed to reducing our carbon footprint, both individually and as a congregation. This is certainly a matter of environmental justice, as those who live affluent lifestyles most contribute to global warming while those who will be most impacted are people in developing countries and future generations. Still, our emissions-reducing efforts do not have an immediate, direct connection with the individuals who will be impacted.

The question of environmental justice is a good example of how the Green Sanctuary program made us gather information and think more intentionally, rather than carrying on as we always have. One of our members has expertise in toxics and made us aware of the impact of toxic chemicals not just on those of us who use them occasionally, but more

importantly on those who use them day after day and have no control. We discarded cleaning supplies that had accumulated over many years and purchased safer materials for our cleaners to use. We raised the issue with other local congregations, and used our church newsletter to encourage all members of the congregation to think about these issues and protect both their employees and their families.

We also welcomed the opportunity to respond to the Governor's initiative to weatherize homes of our elderly neighbors and others who need fuel assistance. This required participants to go into private homes, to be sensitive to privacy concerns and to educate without preaching. It was good to work with our region's Community Action Program.

- *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?*

The culture of our congregation has become more focused on environmental responsibility, and on putting our beliefs into action. Green Sanctuary is now one of the church's standing committees. However, it is not just a committee that carries out activities itself; it is a catalyst for action by many other individuals and groups. For example, as our new minister is reinvigorating the Adult RE program, green concerns are a natural part of the planning. The property committee will follow through on additional recommendations of the energy audit. The Green Sanctuary and Social Action Committees are exploring the possibility of converting part of our lawn into a garden to produce vegetables for the Community Kitchen. The Green Sanctuary committee will continue to facilitate and encourage follow-through by all church groups.

- *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?*

A particularly enjoyable and successful element of our program has been engagement with the wider community. We held an inter-church workshop. We participated in This Old House of Worship with five other congregations. We had a half-page article in the region's largest newspaper. We tabled at the Keene EarthFest, sharing materials about our Green Sanctuary Program. We invited community participation in our Voluntary Simplicity series. We participated in StayWarmNH. We signed up for the Keene 10% Challenge. By engaging in this way, we are able to communicate what we are doing, learn from others, and encourage others to take action.