

Congregation Climate Justice Voter Challenge

Getting Started: Information and Suggestions for Church Leaders

The following are ideas and suggestions which may help Green Team Leaders or other church leaders as they prepare their respective congregations to join the Congregation Climate Justice Voter Challenge. Bill McKibben, founder of 350.org challenges us to think and to work together:

“What’s the best thing an individual can do for the climate? Stop being an individual!”

What is the Congregation Climate Justice Voter Challenge and How does it work?

The Challenge has two levels: *First*, individual congregations are asked to challenge themselves to have at least 75% of their members commit to being faithful and regular voters. *Second*, we’re seeking to have as many churches in the Southern New England Conference of the UCC (CT, MA and RI) join by accepting the Challenge for their individual congregation.

The process for measuring church member commitment is the number who sign the [UCC Creation Care Voter Pledge](#). By signing the Pledge, one simply says that they “pledge to be a consistent voter” and “always prioritize caring for God’s creation in how I vote”. That pledge is passed on to the Environmental Voter Project (see below) who will send reminders of upcoming elections based upon a person’s voting address. Information on the number of members of an individual congregation will be passed back to the congregation leaders/organizers to track progress toward an individual church’s goal.

How do we sign up our church / congregation to join the Challenge?

Simply complete and submit the [“We Accept the Challenge”](#) form. Select your church’s official name from the drop-down menu for churches in your state (CT, MA or RI). The person whose name is on the form will receive periodic updates of the number of people who have signed the SNEUCC Creation Care Voter Pledge. Please let us know your numerical goal, but don’t wait to set a goal before getting started. Please only “Accept the Challenge” once.

What happens when an individual voter signs the Pledge?

You provide your name and contact information and our partners at the Environmental Voter Project will follow up with reminders to vote. Reminding someone of their pledge to vote can dramatically increase that person’s likelihood of voting. The Environmental Voter Project does not endorse candidates or tell people how to vote. Your contact information will only be used by the Environmental Voter Project to send you reminders to vote in upcoming elections.

What is the Environmental Voter Project?

Environmental Voter Project is a non-partisan, nonprofit organization whose mission is to get more environmental supporters to vote in every election. Politicians listen to voters, so if we can dramatically increase the number of environmentalists who vote, then politicians will respond by providing us with the environmental leadership we demand. For more information on the Environmental Voter Project, check out www.environmentalvoter.org.

When does the Challenge begin?

Right now! Primaries are coming up and the count-down is for the general election. We hope to have as many congregations as possible in the Southern New England Conference going public early in the Fall with their commitment to vote their values to care for God’s creation and those most at risk of environmental harm. We offer some suggestions below.

How do we set a goal for our church?

We encourage each congregation to set a numerical goal of at least 75% of the congregation, but how you determine that number is up to each individual congregation. For example, “75% of those worshipping with you” may be based on virtual worship or average attendance or some other form of participation. If 75% feels like a high bar, select a figure or percentage that reflects your congregation, but don’t be afraid to set a stretch goal or to raise your goal later on. You will want to be able to track -- and report -- your progress toward your goal. Even though we ask for your numerical goal on the challenge acceptance form, we will not publicize your goal, nor your

progress toward your goal, unless you ask us to. Needless to say, when you reach your goal you may want to crow about it! Want to change your goal or have questions? Contact Karen Methot (methotk@sneucc.org) in the Conference Office.

How do we decide to participate in the Challenge?

That depends on your congregation. We know that each congregation may have a different process for accepting this Challenge. We recognize that the timing of this Challenge could make it difficult to process your decision. Perhaps members of your Green Team or Church Council or Church Social Action team might take the pledge themselves and challenge others in the congregation to join them? We believe that many in your congregation might welcome this opportunity to let their voice be heard because so many other options are not available because of the pandemic.

What are the keys for success?

There may be many.

- First, people tend to want to be part of a group and to follow natural leaders. Identify some of those leaders or influencers within your congregation and invite them to sign on early and to share their belief in the effectiveness of this process.
- Second, don't rely on a single message to get people to take action, i.e. to sign the Creation Care Voter Pledge. You may want to plan for several ways of reaching people with multiple touches.
- Third, be creative: Every congregation is different. Use approaches which have worked well in the past, but don't hesitate to try new ones.
- Fourth, don't forget that this Challenge will go on for several weeks and that people want to help meet a goal: Think about periodic progress reports a'la the "thermometer chart" for progress on the church's financial pledges.
- Lastly, think about how different people may receive, process and act on information differently. Some may need prodding and a personal request. Social media works for some, but not all. Young people, who are not yet eligible to vote, can be effective in prodding their elders! People of different ages may use and respond to information differently, but all are voters and every vote counts.

How can we encourage participation when we are not meeting in person?

The pandemic has changed many things, and now we're often connecting digitally and in new ways.

- If you are worshipping or sharing fellowship or small groups on Zoom or other platforms, you can include the *Creation Care Voter Pledge* link sneucc-reg.brapp.com/CreationCareVoterPledge in the "Chat" feature and invite participants to click and take the pledge.
- If you have an active church website, consider posting a link to the *Creation Care Voter Pledge* along with some background on the Challenge and/or updates on progress toward your goal.
- If you are active on social media, consider sharing the link on your pages to the *Creation Care Voter Pledge*, encouraging your congregation to share their participation with their social media circles. You could also use Facebook and Twitter to provide updates on your goal of reaching 75%.
- If you have an electronic newsletter, you can include the link to the *Creation Care Voter Pledge*.
- Of course, you can also use "snail mail" and print newsletters to publicize the challenge.
- Your Green Team might consider some targeted emails or phone calls to individual members, encouraging their support for the *Creation Care Voter Pledge*.

What if someone already signed the Pledge?

There is no problem if they already signed the *Creation Care Voter Pledge* or the *Environmental Voter Pledge*. Ask them to sign again so that their name and pledge will be counted in the Congregation Climate Justice Voter Challenge for your congregation! The Environmental Voter Project is able to weed out duplicates and they will not receive multiple, identical reminders. (Make sure to give the same email address as in your initial signing of the pledge.)

What about early voting or absentee voting?

In this time where people may be wary of voting in person because of the Coronavirus, people should be encouraged to consider voting by mail in order to exercise their right to vote. This varies by state, and information

on each state is available on our website [here](#). People may need to request/submit vote by mail applications soon in order to be able to vote in early primaries. Many details for Massachusetts voters are in these [PowerPoint slides](#).

What's next? Beyond the Church?

Whatever your goal, please take the next step of sharing your commitment with your networks and the wider community through outdoor banners, or lawn signs, or articles in local media and social media. Though most congregations are not worshipping in their buildings due to the pandemic, our buildings are centrally located in most communities and banners or lawn signs out front can speak volumes to your neighbors about what your congregation values!

And please share what has worked well for you so that we can share it with others.

Can participation in the Challenge be credited as a task toward recognition as a Green Congregation?

Yes, absolutely, and at any level of the Green Congregation Challenge. Any and all programs which encourage civic engagement to address climate change and environmental justice issues are whole-heartedly supported. Tell us more about your congregation's work in this area and we'll share it with others.

What if our congregation does not join the Challenge?

We strongly urge you to encourage people to sign the [Creation Care Voter Pledge](#) anyway, and to do that multiple times through this election season. They will receive reminders of pending elections from the EVP regardless of whether the church itself has joined the Challenge.

Who is the Environmental Ministries team and how do I contact them?

The Environmental Ministries Team is one of the Justice & Witness Task Teams of the SNEUCC Conference. This team's primary interests are issues related to climate change and environmental justice. We recognize that immediate action is needed to address and slow global warming in order to protect God's creation and the habitability of "Our Common Home". We also recognize that the burdens of air and water pollution fall disproportionately on lower income communities and communities of color, as a result of long-term systemic practices, and that we need broad structural changes to correct those. The Team consists of volunteers with experience, expertise and a passion to seek productive ways and actions, which we can take individually and collectively, which reflect the values of our Christian faith. To contact the EM team, contact Karen Methot in the SNEUCC Conference Office (methotk@sneucc.org).

How does this fit with the UCC denomination's "Our Faith, Our Vote" campaign?

They complement one another. Both encourage voting as a way of expressing our values in civic engagement. The Creation Care Voter Pledge simply underscores the importance of being a "consistent voter" and of "always prioritizing caring for God's creation" in how we vote.

Are there additional resources?

Certainly. See the ["Access more pledge/voting resources"](#) on this website. Information on individual state voting procedures, including vote by mail, as well as the UCC "Our Faith, Our Vote".

More Questions? More Ideas?

If you have further questions or ideas you would like to share, please don't hesitate to contact the SNEUCC Environmental Ministries Team through Karen Methot (methotk@sneucc.org).