

SNEUCC GREEN CONGREGATION CHALLENGE

Choose and complete at least **one step** from **each category** (*Educate, Organize, Connect and Advocate*) and at least **four steps** from *Reduce/Recycle/Rethink*, to reach a **total of 14 steps** and receive recognition for completion of your level. To sign up for the challenge or to access resources to the topics highlighted in **bold**, visit www.sneucc.org/green-congregation-challenge. **Contact** the Rev. Emma Brewer-Wallin, Minister of Economic and Environmental Justice: brewer-walline@sneucc.org or Karen Methot, Program Support Associate: methotk@sneucc.org

LEVEL ONE: Getting Started

Educate

1. Add **environmental stewardship worship services** to your liturgical calendar, incorporating environmental prayers, hymns and preaching about care for Earth's Creation.
2. **Celebrate Earth Day Sunday** with an environmental sermon and follow-up discussion or program.
3. Invite a speaker, show a **film** and expand your programs for adults and youth to include environmental issues and explore what you can do about what you learn.
4. Incorporate Creation care and environmental justice into **faith formation programs for children** and youth.
5. Encourage individuals/households to commit to at least 5 of the "**Ten Things You Can Do to Fight Climate Change.**"

Organize

1. Identify those members who are inspired and passionate about the environment, gauge prior knowledge and expectations, and **organize a "Green Team."** Also see "**Make Some Ripples - Green Team Tips**" from the UCC.
2. Promote regular "green" updates through newsletters, bulletin board, worship announcements, and/or social media to inform, celebrate and advocate on sustainability and environmental justice.
3. Develop a butterfly/pollinator highway or an **organic garden** and share your harvest with the congregation.
4. Plan for regular evaluation of your environmental initiatives and ways to encourage next steps.

Reduce/Recycle/Rethink (Choose at least four actions)

1. Keep radiators/heating ducts and refrigerator coils clean.
2. Recycle paper, bottles and cans.
3. Put office machines on power strips and unplug rarely used appliances and equipment.
4. Reduce hot water temperature to 120 degrees. Only run dishwasher when full. Open the door to let the dishes air dry.
5. Ban Styrofoam products, reduce single use plastic consumption and eliminate bottled water with reusable options.
6. Encourage use of town green spaces and trails and sponsor hikes.
7. Create an electronic newsletter option to reduce paper and encourage the use of opt-out services to reduce **junk mail**.
8. Shift to environmentally sensitive cleaning products.
9. Shift to **organic lawn treatments and native grasses and plants.**

Connect

1. Explore **UCC Environmental Ministries** online resources, subscribe to **the Pollinator** UCC Environmental Justice Blog, and connect with the **SNEUCC's Environmental Ministries Team** on social media, for webinars and at "Super Saturday."
2. Connect with local environmental advocates and sustainability groups. Join and support your state-based organizations like **IREJN, CT IPL, MassIPL** or **RI IPL**.

Advocate

1. Encourage everyone to take the **Creation Care Voter Pledge** through announcements in worship, newsletters, social media and Get Out the Vote events.
2. Host discussion groups on how the legislative process in your state works and how to find your representatives and their voting record.
3. Offer a workshop on how to contact your legislators effectively by phone or letter/email.
4. Invite the SNEUCC **Legislative Advocate Michele Mudrick**, a representative from an environmental advocacy organization, or a member of your town's sustainability team to present current state and local environmental issues.

LEVEL TWO: Creating a Plan

Educate

1. Offer opportunities for members to **discuss the climate crisis** (jump to Education) and other environmental issues, and why it matters to people of faith.
2. Invite those with inspirational experiences to offer testimonies during worship service or begin worship with a **First Announcement** to recognize those taking steps to promote sustainability.
3. Offer **Bible study or book group discussions** (jump to Education) that focus on the stewardship of Creation, sustainability, and intersectional justice issues. Consider this list: **Books about Climate Change, Environmental Justice, Environmental Ethics and Creation Care.**
4. **Encourage and support the involvement of youth** with environmental justice issues and organizations.
5. Begin conversations with members and leaders about **divestment** of church funds from fossil fuel exploration and extraction and other environment-sensitive investments.
6. Learn where and how the climate emergency is impacting your community and region and its **intersection** with economic, racial and social justice.

Organize

1. **Schedule a building energy audit with your utility.** Dive into collecting data to track your baseline energy use. Document actions by recording participation, results and possible revisions or next steps. Take pictures.
2. Organize intergenerational environmental programs, such as trail/beach clean-up and hikes in your area.
3. Offer **opportunities for children and youth** to support environmental action, conservation and sustainability.
4. Organize a carbon-reduction Sunday to walk/bike/carpool or take public transportation to church.
5. Encourage individuals/households to assess their **personal carbon footprint**, contact their utility to schedule an energy audit of their home and promote household participation in renewable electricity, composting and organic gardening programs.

Reduce/Recycle/Rethink (Choose at least four actions)

1. Caulk and weatherize around doors and windows to plug air leaks. Use curtains and blinds to utilize natural lighting and help regulate temperature.
2. **Shift to Fair Trade** and sustainably sourced or local products as well as compostable or reusable options for coffee hour and church functions. When plastic table coverings wear out, replace with cloth.
3. Replace incandescent bulbs and halogen lamps with LED bulbs.
4. Insulate pipes, water heater and warm air heating ducts.
5. Install bike racks at church.
6. Install low flow faucet aerators.
7. Compost church waste; encourage home composting.
8. Collect rainwater in rain barrels for outdoor watering.
9. Design and distribute reusable shopping bags with church logo or make a free bag bin to recycle extra bags.

Connect

1. Promote **UCC resolutions** on climate justice and participate in programs offered by **UCC Environmental Ministry**.
2. Get involved with local and regional environmental and conservation organizations like Sierra Club, 350.org, the League of Conservation Voters, Audubon, the Sunrise Movement or IPL's "Cool Congregations."
3. Promote a **partnership model** between your congregation and **environmental justice communities**, following their lead in taking action on environmental issues.

Advocate

1. Join the SNEUCC "**Congregation Climate Justice Voter Challenge**" and set a goal for your congregation's level of participation.
2. Publicize the congregation's involvement in environmental priorities through outdoor banners/signs, letters to the editor, social media posts and information on your website.
3. Support programs advocating the conservation of **biodiversity** and the protection of all animal and plant species. Also see **Earth Charter**.

LEVEL THREE: Building Momentum

Educate

1. Review your congregation's financial investment portfolios and develop strategies for **divestment** from fossil fuel exploration and extraction.
2. Offer a workshop for members and friends to consider socially responsible investing in ESG funds.
3. Discuss Creation Care advocacy as a **spiritual discipline** (jump to Education).
4. Host a program (guest speaker, film or book discussion) on the global issues of sustainability e.g., **consumerism, regenerative agriculture, plastic reduction**, ocean impacts and climate migration (jump to Education).

Organize

1. Establish a standing "Green Team" within the governing structure of your congregation.
2. Review the **building audit** of your property to determine your short and long-term strategic plans to attain environmental sustainability goals.
3. Designate your energy use savings to create a "**Green Fund**" for future "green" improvements.
4. Did your actions stimulate a behavioral change and promote greater awareness? Assemble data, stories and pictures. Celebrate accomplishments. Publish and share your successes.

Reduce/Recycle/Rethink (Choose at least four actions)

1. Install energy efficient fluorescent lights/ballasts.
2. Install and use programmable thermostats.
3. Use electric lawn and garden care equipment. Electricity is less polluting than gasoline.
4. Install LED exit and emergency lighting/signs.
5. Add air-gap window film to seal leaking windows and/or low emissivity film to keep out summer heat.
6. Initiate exploration to install solar panels and/or purchase 100% green electricity from renewable energy aggregation projects in New England.
7. Install occupant sensors and timers for lights in common areas.
8. Add a solar water heater to reduce use of gas hot water heater or replace standard electric hot water heater with "on demand" hot water system. Consider installing a programmable water heater if you only need hot water on worship days.
9. Add or improve insulation in walls, ceilings and basement.
10. Link members with weatherization and energy efficiency resources for their homes.

Connect

1. Explore the **UCC Creation Justice Church** program.
2. Plan a program or event with representatives from another faith tradition.
3. Host a community program to examine all aspects of transportation in your area.
4. Partner with other local organizations to develop/expand community participation in renewable energy, composting, community gardens, net zero building options or other sustainability initiatives.
5. Participate with local/regional training programs and the **SNEUCC Disaster Resource and Response Team** for emergency response and resilience.
6. Contact and engage with environmental organizations that offer legislative briefings and **advocacy training**.

Advocate

1. Advocate for local and regional bans on products like single use plastics, Styrofoam containers and packaging.
2. Research areas in your state or region affected by toxins like pollution, particulates or lead and get involved in advocating for change.
3. **Actively advocate the passage of local and state environmental legislation** and regulation and promote phone/email campaigns.
4. Organize and implement a lobbying campaign to encourage local business or corporations to make changes to improve sustainability (e.g. reduce packaging, switch to electric vehicles, install solar canopies, etc.)

LEVEL FOUR: Expanding Impact

Educate

1. Begin the process of becoming a **UCC Creation Justice Church**.
2. Preach, lead discussions, and convene study groups on the intersection of climate, racial, social and economic injustices.
3. Recognize that the land on which your community lives, works and plays was the original territory of the indigenous people who first cared for it. Acknowledge your debt and advocate for their descendants.
4. Through study and sermons, connect the congregation with climate actions involving non-violent protests and **civil disobedience**. Encourage members to attend a training on civil disobedience.

Organize

1. Complete your congregation's **divestment from fossil fuel** exploration, extraction and refinement, while encouraging other organizations to consider taking such a step.
2. Organize tree planting in environmentally stressed areas.
3. Organize a community organic garden and share produce with the food pantry.
4. Learn how your congregation can be involved in assisting with **adaptation actions** to address the threats of climate change in your region.
5. Apply to become a "**Cool Congregation**" through Interfaith Power and Light.

Reduce/Recycle/Rethink (Choose at least four actions)

1. Replace old furnace, heaters, air conditioners. If you need a new furnace, install an air or ground source heat pump heating and cooling system.
2. Lease or purchase solar panels.
3. Buy **Energy Star** appliances.
4. Install dual flush toilets and motion-activated faucets.
5. Replace inefficient windows and doors.
6. Utilize xeriscaping for lawns and landscaping to reduce size of lawns with native grasses and plants that require less water and store more carbon.
7. Switch to all electric vehicles and install charging stations.
8. Plant trees next to your building – evergreen on the north and east to break cold winds and deciduous on the south and west to provide cooling shade.

Connect

1. Partner with **regional, national, and globally based environmental organizations** on climate crisis, biodiversity conservation, toxic substances, and sustainable development issues.
2. Provide leadership with other faith-based institutions on issues related to social, racial, economic and environmental justice
3. Share your successes with your congregation, community, media and with the SNEUCC Environmental Team and with the UCC Environmental Ministries

Advocate

1. Increase participation in the **Congregation Climate Justice Voter Challenge** and make every election a call for values-based voting on environment and justice.
2. Partner with another congregation whose members are being harmed by climate change or environmental racism and support them in their advocacy efforts for cleaner air and water quality.
3. Enlist members to write articles, speak at hearings and attend marches and rallies to safeguard our planet from further harm.
4. Based on the passions of your congregation, choose and champion local/state/national environmental legislation and develop an advocacy campaign to call upon elected officials to support environmental justice.
5. Establish a "Climate Advocates" group to mobilize the congregation for rapid response to emerging issues or legislation.

Additional resources and links at www.sneucc.org/environmental-ministries. Members of the Environmental Ministries Team are also available to resource your congregation!