



Unity EarthCare Team EarthCare Program

www.unity.org/earthcare earthcare@unity.org

Overview

The Unity EarthCare Team (UET), a ministry team of Unity Worldwide Ministries, designed the **EarthCare Program** (Part I herein) to assist congregations in integrating an earth-oriented spirituality into their ministry. UET's mission is to foster awareness of our spiritual oneness with our Earth home and promote active care of creation.

The EarthCare Program is based upon the **Path to EarthCare** (Part II herein), a seven-step process that helps each church community to discover what Spirit calls them to do to care for our Earth home, while the Congregation Program provides the ways by which the Path is achieved. The Path recognizes spiritual commitment and visioning as essential components of reaching this goal and it is anticipated that ministries pursuing a commitment to EarthCare would likely cycle through these steps many times as they proceed along their path. The EarthCare Program manifests Unity's Fifth Basic Principle: *Through thoughts, words and actions we live the truth we know.*

The Path includes the following steps, each of which is described in Part II:

Pray Vision Act Inspire Learn Share Renew

For each step there are a few examples of possible activities. A more extensive list of possible EarthCare activities and other valuable resources can be found in the document "Additional EarthCare Actions" at www.unity.org/bethechange under EarthCare.

Part I: EARTH-CARE PROGRAM

The EarthCare Program includes the following tracks, each of which is described in more detail in the paragraphs to follow:

- Track A: EarthCare Covenant**
- Track B: EarthCare Commitment**
- Track C: EarthCare Congregation**

Congregations may choose any of the three tracks. Each track is designed with increasing levels of commitment and activities that guide Congregations further along the seven-step Path to EarthCare: from setting an intention through adoption of an EarthCare Covenant (Track A), to accomplishing some meaningful actions in the Commitment Program (Track B), to expressing EarthCare in all aspects of the ministry by completing all seven steps of the Path and receiving certification as an EarthCare Congregation (Track C). Regardless of the option

chosen, it is important that the ministry leadership be included in discerning EarthCare actions that are appropriate for the ministry.

The EarthCare Program gives all ministries a great deal of flexibility to determine the level of involvement with EarthCare at which they feel most comfortable, whether or not they own their own facility. In addition, ministries that initially choose Tracks A or B can commit to Tracks B or C at a later date.

Sample activities are listed for each step of the Path and on the **Action Checklist** (Form 3). Excellent websites and books, with more suggestions and resources, are listed in the **Suggested EarthCare Resources** compiled by UET, which may be found at www.unity.org/earthcare under EarthCare. The possibilities are limited only by your creativity!

All congregations participating in the EarthCare Program will receive support and resources from UET, including e-newsletters and networking opportunities. In return, the congregation may be asked to answer questions, provide information, or provide mentorship to new ministries interested in EarthCare.

Recognition by UET—Once a congregation determines to pursue any Track of the EarthCare Program, the ministry must submit the **Notice of Initiation** (Part III, Form 1) to UET. Doing so allows UET to track participation in the program as well as to support congregations with mentoring, e-newsletters and networking opportunities. Upon completion of the requirements of the chosen Track, the ministry must submit the **Notice of Completion** (Part III, Form 2). In addition, Tracks B and C should also submit the **Action Checklist** (Part III, Form 3), along with a description of each action taken by the ministry. Additional documentation is strongly encouraged. Following review and approval, the congregation will be recognized by UET through issuance of a Certificate of Completion. The ministry also will be acknowledged on the UET website.

Once a ministry has been recognized by UET for having completed any Track of the EarthCare Program, self-monitoring by the church will take over.

We welcome questions, suggestions and feedback for improving the **EarthCare Program**. Please contact us at earthcare@unity.org.

Track A: EarthCare Covenant

The purpose of an EarthCare Covenant is to assist congregations in achieving the Pray and Vision steps on the Path to EarthCare. A covenant is a sacred trust between the congregation and Spirit. A covenant expresses a conscious awareness of our oneness with creation and a commitment by the congregation to care for the Earth as a significant component of the ministry.

Congregations may adopt the provided **EarthCare Covenant** below or create their own. Writing a covenant can be extremely meaningful for the congregation as it helps develop a vision for the work. We suggest the covenant be presented and signed at a ceremony involving the entire community, and posted in the ministry as a declaration of their sacred trust.

Our consciousness reveals that all of creation is connected as one. The story of creation reveals that we are to be good caregivers of the creation. As a people of faith, we commit to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of all existence. We honor our spiritual commitment to the care, support and defense of the balance between our individual needs and those of nature. We envision a world in which everything has intrinsic value and where all beings are assured a secure and meaningful life that is ecologically responsible and sustainable. We agree to transform our individual and congregational lives into acts of moral witness, discarding harmful habits for new behaviors that demonstrate our respect for this harmony and interconnectedness.

We declare our covenant with God to walk upon the Earth for the greatest good of all creation.

Adopted this, the ____ day of _____, 20____.

Governing body

Church/Congregation

Chairperson, Governing Body

Senior Minister/Spiritual Leader

Congregations that have adopted Track A: Covenant are encouraged to follow the intent of the Renew step of the Path by annually reviewing and re-focusing its commitment to the covenant.

Track B: EarthCare Commitment

By committing to **EarthCare**, congregations must choose any three of the seven steps of the **Path to EarthCare** and complete actions for those steps that are appropriate for the ministry. In this program, the congregation and ministry leadership are invited to create a vision for EarthCare and then take actions that demonstrate a commitment to realizing that vision.

Track C: EarthCare Congregation

Becoming an **EarthCare Congregation** entails completion of all seven steps on the **Path to EarthCare**, as outlined in the **Action Checklist**. It is a comprehensive approach to an earth-oriented spirituality that touches the entire life of the ministry. The program is centered on cultivating a consciousness for EarthCare that includes both spiritual and practical actions. It is our experience that by completing this track, a sustainable vision of EarthCare will be integrated into the life of the ministry.

Part II: PATH TO EARTH CARE

Pray

Our consciousness of God opens the way for ideas, inspiration, and guidance. To begin EarthCare in a ministry, first create a consciousness for the work through prayer. Prayer guides the ministry to its own unique expressions of caring for creation.

TRY:

- ▶ Holding a special service for Earth Day Sunday
- ▶ Including prayers for creation in each Sunday service
- ▶ Building a labyrinth for reflecting on our connection with all creation

Vision

Once a ministry discerns, through prayer, a call to adopt EarthCare, it should create a vision for the work with the ministry leadership. This may take the form of a vision statement, a mission statement, or covenant to care for creation.

- ◆ A covenant is a sacred trust. It expresses the ministry's vision for care of creation and an intention to take actions that express the vision. It should be considered a pact between the congregation and Spirit.
- ◆ A vision statement is an affirmation that concentrates on the future, is a source of inspiration, and provides clear decision-making criteria. A vision statement sets the direction for future planning.
- ◆ A mission statement defines the purpose, critical processes and goals of the EarthCare program.

When developing a vision for EarthCare, the congregation may hold a prayerful dialogue by asking questions such as: "How do we perceive God?" "What is our relationship to God's creation?" "How can we be good stewards of Earth?"

We also encourage ministries to create an **Action Plan**. The action plan outlines the ways the leadership and congregation intend to express an earth care consciousness in the life of the ministry.

Take Action

To express loving care for the Earth requires a commitment of time, energy, and money. The specific actions taken will depend on the needs and vision of the community. The activities may be simple or complex, contained solely within the ministry, or reach out into the broader community. We encourage EarthCare Congregations to express their vision and creativity by adopting sustainable lifestyle practices. The actions of the ministry can be a model and encourage individuals to make changes in their personal lives as well.

Energy/Environmental Audit

An environmental/energy audit assesses all aspects of a congregation's environmental practices, from both a real estate as well as a business/operational standpoint, and recommends ways in which the ministry can reduce energy consumption, minimize waste, recycle and become a better caregiver of the environment through environmental conservation. While the scope of work differs for each audit, a comprehensive audit typically encompasses the following categories:

I. Building

- II. Grounds
- III. Lighting
- IV. Water use and water heating
- V. Heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC)
- VI. Operations and maintenance
- VII. Business operations

While some of these categories are primarily applicable to congregations that own their own building and grounds, others apply equally to all congregations regardless of whether they own, rent, or use their facility. The scope of work can be tailored to meet the needs of each congregation.

Statistics show that faith organizations that adopt energy-efficient practices save an average of 33% on their operational costs. Through an audit, congregation members are encouraged to learn how personal lifestyle choices affect the environment and what alternative choices are available to minimize that impact. Ministry programs can expand to include earth care issues that members see as important to their faith, and demonstrate ways to live their lives in spiritual harmony with the environment. Members are proud to belong to a ministry that cares about our Earth and is committed to protecting the environment.

Some municipalities or utilities offer these energy audits for free. Check in your area or go to www.theregenerationproject.org. In addition, UET has developed an environmental audit master guide and property inspection form that cover all the areas found in a formal audit. Go to www.unity.org/earthcare, under “EarthCare Green Facility Assessment,” or contact UET. These forms are especially useful for congregations that have sufficient internal technical expertise but who don’t wish to spend the money required for a formal audit by a professional environmental site assessment company.

For congregations that don’t own their own facility, there are a number of things the congregation can do as an alternative:

TRY:

- ▶ Using UET’s environmental audit master guide and property inspection form, assess non-realty areas such as lighting, water use/water heating, operations and maintenance, and business operations in order to reduce energy usage and operational costs.
- ▶ Encouraging your landlord or host facility owner to adopt responsible environmental policies and practices. Consider making this a condition of lease approval/renewal.
- ▶ Initiating an ongoing campaign to reduce the congregation’s annual “energy footprint” (i.e., number of pounds of carbon dioxide greenhouse gasses emitted into the environment annually) by 20% or more.
- ▶ Committing the congregation to an ongoing policy of reduce, reuse and recycle.
- ▶ Networking with other smaller congregations, within your community or beyond, to promote environmental sustainability and social justice.

Energy Conservation

Perhaps the single greatest human activity affecting global climate change is the production of carbon dioxide through the extensive use of fossil fuels. Reducing our rate of use of these traditional energy sources will conserve these resources, lower utility bills, and help preserve ecological systems as well as human cultures.

TRY:

- ▶ Implementing recommendations of energy audits to reduce heat and electric bills.
- ▶ Selling CFL or LED light bulbs.

- ▶ Promoting carpooling, walking/bicycling or using public transit.

Recycling

A recycling program or connecting with existing programs is an easy way for congregations to take meaningful environmental action on a limited budget.

TRY:

- ▶ Recycling office paper, cans, bottles, newspaper, cardboard, magazines and junk mail.
- ▶ Preparing a recycling guide for the congregation.
- ▶ Partnering with nonprofit organizations to utilize a portion of your parking lot as a community recycling collection point for used clothing and small household items.

Waste Minimization

Over-consumption contributes to pollution and to our landfills. What we purchase and consume are votes for those goods and services. Decisions to "reduce" and "reuse" are powerful spiritual statements of environmental responsibility, both for us and the larger community.

TRY:

- ▶ Using washable cups, plates, and utensils for Sunday hospitality.
- ▶ Installing low-flow toilets and/or a timer for the hot water heater.
- ▶ Making thermostat adjustments.
- ▶ Replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs.

Water Conservation and Landscaping

Water pollution is one of the leading consumption-related environmental problems facing the world today.

TRY:

- ▶ Adopting a water budget.
- ▶ Selecting new plantings that are native or other low-water plants.
- ▶ Practicing "grass recycling."
- ▶ Limiting the use of gas-powered mowers. Lawn maintenance contractors should be required to mow early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Set lawnmower blade one notch higher as longer grass means less evaporation.
- ▶ Making sure sprinklers do not water non-green areas. Place a layer of mulch around plants and trees to reduce evaporation. (Make a donut-shaped mulch pile around plants. Do not heap mulch around stems.) Water early in the morning or late in the day. More than half the water applied to lawns and gardens can be lost through evaporation or runoff because of over watering.
- ▶ Using organic or natural lawn, shrub, and tree fertilizers.
- ▶ Harvesting rainwater from drainpipes and install underground distribution lines to lawn areas.

Stewardship of Natural Resources

One of the greatest satisfactions of life is to explore, enjoy, and care for natural spaces, both in our backyards and globally. Through these activities we promote the responsible use of the Earth's ecosystems and resources.

TRY:

- ▶ Adopting and maintaining a park, stream, neighborhood, street, highway, cemetery, beach, or trail, either as an individual congregation or in partnership with another organization.

- ▶ Attending hikes and conservation work projects, (i.e., tree planting, stream cleanup, and trail maintenance) sponsored by conservation organizations.

Promote Awareness of the Interdependence of Creation

We are called to a renewed reverence for life and respect for the interdependent web of creation. Through an expansion and re-centering of our awareness to include the whole planetary ecosystem, we will come into deeper alignment with the oneness of the universe. This awareness will guide the use of our collective culture for the common good.

TRY:

- ▶ Promoting food cooperatives to buy locally or organically grown food products.
- ▶ Responding to climate change.
- ▶ Advocating and actively promoting an environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling and socially just presence on Earth for all of creation.
- ▶ Periodically hosting the symposium, “Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream.”

Inspire

With inspiration, our prayers and vision begin to move into outer expression. Ministries can inspire care of the Earth by including an Earth focus in their activities, such as Sunday services, prayers, songs, and special ceremonies. The Truth that God is everywhere present in creation then becomes alive in people’s minds and hearts, and translates into daily action.

Learn

It is important to gather information and resources to educate ourselves in preparation for future action. Further, sponsoring educational activities in our ministries opens a space for individuals and the community to explore, pray and discern greater understanding about complex environmental topics. Such experiences may bring into ministries the challenging issues of life on Earth and create spiritual connection with them. Educating people to pray first and act upon guidance fosters unity and God-centered action. Obvious avenues for communication include the ministry newsletter, Sunday bulletin, and displays.

TRY:

- ▶ Involving the children and youth group in activities that promote care for the Earth and one another.
- ▶ Show a documentary film on an EarthCare topic.
- ▶ Hold a study group on sustainable living or voluntary simplicity.
- ▶ Developing an ongoing environmental educational program that outreaches beyond your individual congregation.

Share

Sharing our ideas and successes, through word-of-mouth, presentations, and news media, is important for fostering the work within our congregations and the larger community. Networking with other groups and programs reminds us that we are not alone in the task of caring for creation. Unity ministries may network with local conservation groups, interfaith creation care centers, and spiritual centers of other denominations with creation care programs. As we become aware of the work within Unity and elsewhere, our common ground—Earth—becomes a sacred home for unity. By raising awareness of our common cause, we can unite our actions to care for humanity and the planet that sustains us.

TRY:

- ▶ Hosting or participating in an activity that networks with other interested churches and/or groups.
- ▶ Developing an email network with other Unity congregations and religious denominations in your area that are interested in environmental issues.
- ▶ Promoting the ideals of your congregation's EarthCare program through a variety of mass media outlets.

Renew

Every work has its seasons. There are ebbs and flows in EarthCare work. However, even during a “winter” season of low energy for projects, we can maintain sacred space for creation through Sunday services and special ceremonies. Prayer and visioning anew, perhaps annually, allows the ministry to re-assess where to focus its efforts.

TRY:

- ▶ Sponsoring an annual retreat to review and renew the principles upon which your earth care team is committed.
- ▶ Holding an annual meeting to review the congregation's EarthCare accomplishments and vision future objectives, goals and activities.

Part III: FORMS

Form 1	Notice of Initiation
Form 2	Notice of Completion
Form 3	Action Checklist

Form 1



Unity EarthCare Program Notice of Initiation

This notice signifies that on _____, 20____,

_____ of _____
The governing body *Church/Spiritual Center*

of _____
City *State*

determined to pursue:

- adopting a Covenant of EarthCare (Track A); Or
- making the Commitment to EarthCare (Track B); Or
- becoming a Certified EarthCare Congregation (Track C).

Senior Minister/Spiritual Leader

Chairperson, Governing Body

The EarthCare contact person for our Congregation is:

Name

Address

City

State

ZIP

Telephone

Fax

Email Address

(Submit this form to the Unity EarthCare Team at earthcare@unity.org.)

Form 2



Unity EarthCare Program Notice of Completion

This notice signifies that on _____, 20____,

_____ of _____
The governing body Church/Spiritual Center

completed the following tracks of the EarthCare Program.

- _____ Track A: EarthCare Covenant
 - _____ *Track B: EarthCare Commitment
 - _____ *Track C: EarthCare Congregation
- *Action Checklist (Form 3) attached, with appropriate documentation.

Senior Minister/Spiritual Leader

Chairperson, Governing Body

Address

Street

_____ City _____ State _____ ZIP Code

The EarthCare contact person for our Congregation is:

Name

_____ Address _____ City

_____ State _____ ZIP _____ Telephone _____ Fax

Email Address

(Submit this form, along with the Certification Checklist and a description of the actions taken, to the Unity EarthCare Team at earthcare@unity.org.)

Form 3



Unity EarthCare Program

Action Checklist

The ministry has completed the following steps of the path to EarthCare. For each step, a narrative description of the actions taken, along with appropriate support documentation, is attached.

- ☐ **Background:** Discussion of the congregation’s environmental efforts including history, current status (i.e., membership, frequency of meetings, etc.) and future goals/plans.
- ☐ **Pray:** We have created a consciousness for EarthCare work through prayer.
- ☐ **Vision:** We have formulated our vision through a covenant, vision statement or mission statement.
- ☐ **Inspire:** We have maintained a sacred space for creation through Sunday services and special ceremonies.
- ☐ **Learn:** We have sponsored educational activities within the church and within the community.
- ☐ **Act:** We have completed the following actions, according to the attached explanations.
 - ☐ Conducted an energy/environmental audit.
 - ☐ Implemented the recommendations of an energy/environmental audit.
 - ☐ Taken action(s) that resulted in the ministry becoming a better caregiver of the environment with a greater awareness of its oneness with the Earth. Please document. (**Note:** This is for congregations in which an energy/environmental audit was not feasible.)
 - ☐ Practiced energy conservation.
 - ☐ Recycled.
 - ☐ Minimized waste.
 - ☐ Practiced water conservation.
 - ☐ Accepted stewardship of a natural resource.
 - ☐ Promoted awareness of the interdependence of creation.
 - ☐ Established a recycling program.
 - ☐ Minimized waste of water, paper, heating and cooling.
 - ☐ Established native, self-sustaining landscaping.
- ☐ **Share:** We have shared our ideas and successes within the congregation and the community.
- ☐ **Renew:** We have periodically renewed, re-assessed, and celebrated our vision.

Special circumstances/reasons making it impossible to implement the following item(s) on the checklist (please describe):

Congregations are encouraged to submit additional documentation that they feel is relevant to their EarthCare program.