



Reconnecting with Creation

A cross-generational “greenshop” for congregations

by Kim Copeland

This five-hour workshop (including potluck lunch) is designed to bring together both long-time and new members of a congregation to support the United Church’s efforts on climate change, energy, sustainable communities, and water. It offers an opportunity for different generations to work together to help the church reduce its ecological footprint. The green theme is suitable for any age group; simply adjust the length of each component and fine-tune the nature of the activities. (See sidebar on page 22 for additional activities for children and youth.)

Objectives

- To recognize the connections between church and ecology
- To explore the congregation’s current building and operations from the perspective of sustainability
- To brainstorm ideas for reducing your church’s ecological footprint, and prioritize items for action

Preparation

- Identify a workshop facilitator who has an understanding of environmental issues. Past experience leading workshops is also an asset.
- If possible, arrange an energy audit of the church building and property. The results will be beneficial for the workshop. Consult Faith & the Common Good (<http://faith-commongood.net>) for audit information.
- If you intend to include the manse in the energy audit or workshop tour, be sure to contact its occupants to schedule it when it’s convenient.
- Organize a mini eco-fair to be held the morning of the event. Collect merchandise and information about various eco-products and services: green cleaning products, energy/water efficiency kits, sustainable clothing, fair trade foods, local farmers’ markets, etc. Invite a couple of environmental organizations or green shops to set up their own information tables. At lunchtime, a fair trade coffee merchant or local farmer might be happy to present to the group over dessert.
- Post a sign-up sheet for potluck items for lunch; encourage sustainable foods (local, unprocessed, organic, and/or unpackaged).

- Ask your minister to participate by preparing a 5–10 minute presentation about the connections between church and ecology, and why congregations should strive to be sustainable (to conclude Joining Together). If the minister is staying for the workshop, invite him or her to lead the opening and closing prayer as well.
- Contact representatives from other places of worship where green initiatives are underway. Invite one or two guests to give a brief presentation of their initiatives (for Inspiration from Beyond).

Facilities and Supplies

The workshop should take place in a room large enough to accommodate small tables of four or five participants, with a flip chart and podium area set up at the front. Arrange a suitable place for the mini eco-fair, and set up a group tour of the church property. Access to a kitchen, or at least to a sink, will be necessary for cleaning up after snacks and meals. In keeping with the green theme, avoid disposable dishes. You’ll also need

- nametags
- coffee and tea (organic fair trade, if possible), juice and snacks
- a compost bucket (if necessary, arrange to have a participant with a backyard composter take home the contents)
- recycling receptacle(s)
- loose paper, markers, pens

Getting Started (15 min.)

As participants arrive, give them a nametag and invite them to visit the eco-fair. A few moments before the workshop is scheduled to begin, encourage everyone to sit down. Welcome participants, review the day’s agenda and objectives, and let them know about breaks, washrooms, and so on.

Joining Together (30 min.)

Open the workshop with an ecologically centred prayer or song.

Ask participants to stand, introduce themselves, and highlight one environmental action to which they have

committed themselves in their personal lives.

Next, ask participants to reflect on the connection between their faith and the ecology. Each person should write down an answer to the question, *Why should our congregation strive to be more sustainable?* Allow a few minutes for participants to discuss their answers at their table and then share them with the larger group.

If the minister has prepared a short response to this question, this is a good time for him or her to share it.

Inspiration from Beyond (45 min.)

Hearing green tales from one or two other congregations will provide inspiration and insight into the greening process. Presentations should be short (maximum 20 min. each) and provide a simple overview of the visitors' greening projects, including achievements and lessons learned. Keeping technical details to a minimum will ensure that the presentations are understood by all participants. And remember, a photo is worth a thousand words!

Refreshment Break (10 min.)

Our Current Footprint (1 hour)

Drawing from a prepared list as well as from the preceding presentations, identify the main components of a greening project, naming high-level topics such as energy consumption and efficiency, waste management, chemical use, air quality, outdoor maintenance, and procurement. Give participants an opportunity to supplement the list. (More specific brainstorming will take place later.)

To energize the group and gain a visual understanding of your situation, take them on a tour of the church property. This is especially pertinent if your building has recently undergone an energy audit. The auditor, a member of the property committee, or a qualified congregant can be the tour guide. Pay direct attention to areas of environmental interest, e.g., projects that are underway, completed, or require future action. Point out drafts, lighting issues, energy concerns, and so on.

Lunch and Fellowship (1 hour)

The potluck lunch break offers plenty of opportunity to focus on sustainability. Give participants a folding card on which to write the name of their dish and to highlight any green benefits (e.g., organic cheese, local carrots, no packaging). Avoid disposable dishes if possible. Reusable dishes will reduce your waste output and serve as a symbolic gesture of your congregation's commitment to greening its operations. Serve pitchers of ice water with glasses, not bottled water.

Start by expressing gratitude in the form of grace. Here is a slightly modified version of a spirited all-ages favourite. It pays tribute to the inherent value of local products:

Oh the Lord is good to me
and so I thank the Lord
for giving me the things I need,
within a 100 miles indeed!
The Lord is good to me.
Johnny Appleseed, Amen!

Source: KAIROS, "Do It All With a 100-Mile Church Dinner or Picnic," www.re-energize.org/En/pdfs/100MileChurchPicnic.pdf. Used with permission.

A short (15 min.) presentation about sustainable food is well suited to dessert-time. If you are serving coffee, consider inviting a local coffeehouse to speak briefly about fair trade coffee. Or you could serve a dessert featuring local produce and invite an area farmer to speak about sustainable farming practices and regional food sources. The speaker might even be willing to donate some of the produce in exchange for this opportunity.

Place composting and recycling receptacles in your dish drop-off area—and if necessary, arrange for a volunteer to take the compost home to a backyard composter.

Brainstorming (40 min.)

Ask participants to brainstorm specific green projects that could be undertaken in the church, manse, and grounds. Costs and technical barriers should be disregarded at

Ideas for Involving Children and Youth

Brainstorm ideas for greening your Sunday school.

Lead a papermaking workshop using left-over bulletins from past services. Papermaking kits are available at craft stores.

Plant a garden of native species.

Invite a master composter to help participants install a composter on the church grounds. Contact your local municipality to inquire about purchasing a composter and setting up a presentation.

this stage. If an energy audit has been completed for your church, ensure that the report's recommendations are included on the list. Record all ideas on the flip chart and post them on the wall.

Setting Priorities (30 min.)

Create a plan of action by categorizing the ideas from the brainstorming into goals for the short, medium, and long term (i.e., six months, one year, five years). Encourage open discussion and the sharing of background information, and aim to reach a general consensus. Your plan might include a presentation to council, applications for external funding, creation of a green committee, and so on. In some cases,

additional research may be required following the workshop to assess the current situation and refine the goals. For example, do you need to initiate a recycling program or simply revitalize the existing one?

Closing (10 min.)

Provide a brief summary of the envisioned greening process that was agreed to and thank participants for attending. Gather in a circle and join hands to close the workshop with a prayer.

—*Kim Copeland is committed to meaningful acts of green in Ottawa, Ontario.*

Socially Responsible Meals Come Home

It was an early autumn meeting of the Huron-Perth Presbytery. Before the plenary session, the presbytery's Division of Mission in Canada gathered to discuss all that had arisen over the summer hiatus. There was lots to consider, and everyone appreciated getting to the final agenda item.

The woman presenting the item began almost apologetically, but it was evident this was something she cared about intensely. "It seems so obvious, really, just common sense, yet it's something our church isn't addressing. Responsible meals are something we can do now!"

She was talking about food—food, in particular, that's served at church events, and where that food comes from. The motion that resulted, and that the presbytery subsequently adopted, was that there should "be a concerted effort to serve socially responsible meals" at all future church gatherings.

What does that mean? From now on, all meals will, to as great a degree as possible, be made from locally grown and produced foods. And, just in case it costs a bit more to use locally produced foods, Huron-Perth took the extra precaution of raising the cost of meals at all of its events by 50 percent.

In planning church meals, we must remember that the farmer's share of the price paid at the supermarket check-out hasn't risen in over two decades. Members of many of our church families who supported their farming by working in the manufacturing sector have been among those laid off in the current recession.

From a country for which food commodities were once a primary export, Canada is rapidly evolving into a nation



Jean Carruthers

The meal for a celebration hosted by the Aamjiwnaang First Nation for the members of Lambton Presbytery consisted of locally produced food.

that cannot feed itself. Since we truly live in the Creator's "promised land," that's a pretty sad admission. So the challenge goes out to all presbyteries of the United Church to follow the example of Huron-Perth.

In other London Conference presbyteries, similar motions now only await approval at upcoming meetings. Kent Presbytery, home of some of the largest field, orchard, and hothouse food-growing operations in Ontario, already has a well-established principle of using only locally grown produce. For the past few years, London Conference has required caterers for its annual general meeting to provide local food and use only fair trade tea and coffee.