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YOUR PLACE TO EXCHANGE IDEAS AND EXPERIENCES

Small Steps Lead to Big Savings by Michael Ball

A church ensures its Christmas is greener and its carbon footprint is smaller

TRINITY UNITED, SHELBURNE, NOVA SCOTIA

- location: small town
- 125 members

CANCELLING THEIR TRADITION TO BUY A CHRISTMAS tree for the church's "Lights for Loved Ones" fundraiser, the people at Trinity United Church discovered that the "green" savings could prove more than they'd anticipated.


The annual fundraiser at Trinity United in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, invites individuals to buy lights in memory of or in celebration of a loved one and to hang the lights on a large outdoor Advent-Christmas tree. By denying themselves their usual new tree, the members of Trinity saved the fuel required to cut and transport a big fir and also left the tree to continue to beautify the woods rather than be chipped up after Christmas.

In place of the fir, the church planned to use its MacKay Memorial blue spruce, which had been planted a number of years earlier and had grown sufficiently to serve the same purpose.

Then the people at Trinity added further to their energy savings by changing from incandescent to LED tree lights. When they researched the options, they learned that LED lights burn about 1 percent of the power used by incandescent lights. For Trinity's situation, power for

LEDs would cost about \$0.35 compared to \$25.00 for incandescent bulbs.

The move to implement a green strategy at Trinity had started in the fall of 2007 when the church initiated a big insulating project that cut fuel consumption in half in the sanctuary, and by one third in the hall in the first year.

These were significant energy savings, yet the church realized that to become as green as possible it should implement change in small ways as well. The "small" idea to cancel a new Christmas tree led to significant energy savings that have continued to inspire Trinity to pursue its green initiatives in other "small" ways. 

Michael Ball is now retired and living in rural Nova Scotia. He enjoys helping the Mission and Service Fund at the presbytery, Conference, and local church levels.

SEND A SUBMISSION

See www.united-church.ca/sales/mandate for the "Invitation to Writers."

Living with Respect in Creation

by Newtonbrook's Green Team

Installing energy-efficient furnace, refrigerators, and freezers is an important green action

Two actions have had a measurable impact on reducing Newtonbrook United's carbon footprint. The congregation in North York, Ontario, installed a more efficient furnace plus refrigerators and freezers that qualify for the "Energy Star" label.

These green actions were carried out thanks to the initiative of Rory O'Brien of the interfaith organization Faith & the Common Good, whose walk through the building led to the congregation's determination to respond to the call of faith to "live with respect in Creation." The church, built in 1959–61, reports it has significantly reduced its consumption of both natural gas and electricity.

Newtonbrook's commitment to live with respect in creation has spread to other areas of church concern.

Green spaces, such as large parks and wetlands, are areas where rain and snowfall can filter naturally into the aquifers that lie beneath our feet—aquifers that supply water to streams, rivers, and lakes. These underground aquifers also provide water to many of the villages, towns, and cities throughout Canada. Preserving large tracts of green space is essential for the nurture of life in an urban environment, but they are often threatened by commercial, industrial, or residential development.

Members of the Newtonbrook congregation have been busy writing letters and sending petitions to the local political elite requesting that the David Dunlap Observatory lands

in neighbouring Richmond Hill (where some of the members live) be retained as a natural park, heritage site, and a working observatory for research and public education. The lands occupy 189 acres in an urban environment, and there is a plan to develop this into condominiums and housing units.

Newtonbrook has recently formed the Green Team. Its purpose is to raise awareness and facilitate advocacy and action on environmental and eco-justice issues, in partnership with the congregation's Global Issues Team. Some of the first initiatives of the Green Team include installing a bicycle rack to encourage cycling to church, a community garden, and hosting an eco-fair in partnership with another local congregation.

The Green Team has also discussed performing an in-house audit of Newtonbrook's purchasing policies. The purpose of this review would be to benchmark current practices so that the church could move toward being a more sustainable congregation, meeting some of the goals in the church's new vision statement.

For the summer of 2009, the Green Team recommended that the congregation read two books on environmental topics, both written by Canadian authors: *Sea Sick* by Alanna Mitchell and *The Geography of Hope* by Chris Turner.

Newtonbrook's Green Team is also part of the Green Awakening Network of United Church of Canada congregations in the Greater Toronto Area. [m](#)

NEWTONBROOK UNITED CHURCH, TORONTO, ONTARIO

- a suburban congregation
- 150 people passionate about social and eco-justice issues
- in partnership with the Taiwanese United Church, opened Lester B. Pearson Place, an affordable housing project for 53 families.



Food, Clothes, and a Listening Ear

by Darrow Woods



Ross Roberts

A children's theatre production of *Oliver!* raised funds to support local families.

This white gift program supports families throughout the year

Kaye McGirr was enumerating for an election when she knocked on a townhouse door in Oakville, Ontario. The door was answered by a single mother of two young children who had nothing to feed her children, and lacked the warm clothes she would need to venture out for help. The look on her face changed Kaye's life.

Kaye soon returned with a carload of food and clothes. She'd asked members of her church to help. The White Gift Program at Trinity United Church was born. Every December for the next 20 years Kaye's house overflowed with food and gifts, and a crew would gather to sort, wrap, and pack Christmas hampers.

Kaye connected with "her" families. She prayed for them. She made regular phone calls and home visits. With the support of the church, and local businesses, help was offered all year round. Kaye's late husband, Norm, encouraged her ministry and often served as a driver for deliveries.

When Kaye retired in 1998, Linda Roberts, one of the "wrapping crew," stepped up. She is in ongoing contact with 22 households. (This grows to 40 at Christmas time.) Food is offered, or grocery store gift cards. Sometimes Linda shops for a gift to make a child's birthday special. Often the best thing


is to lend a listening ear. Families get a hamper at Easter, back to school, Thanksgiving, and Christmas.

The congregation supports the program with ongoing donations of food and cash.

Contributions come in every week. Linda and her husband, Ross, do most of the work, with help from member Kathy Irvine. They also call on people to help with wrapping at Christmas time.

The program's strength lies in community partnerships. Referrals come from Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Children's Aid, and the YMCA. Linda compares lists with other churches and agencies to minimize duplication.

Sororities, bridge groups, gourmet dinner clubs, a hospital physiotherapy department, a hair salon, and a chiropractor's office support the program. The youth group at neighbouring St. John's United sponsors families for Christmas. Some individuals fill the wish lists for their families every year. Students at nearby White Oaks Secondary School collect food in return for the use of quiet rooms at the church for their exams. Circumstances improve with some families, and they in turn make contributions to help others.

This summer, the Oakville Children's Music Theatre partnered with Trinity for a special Sunday afternoon presentation of the musical *Oliver!* Admission was a donation of food or money to the White Gift Program. Director Dianne Devaux saw this as an excellent way to help her students make the connections between the classic Dickens story, and the circumstances of families living in poverty today. 

**TRINITY UNITED CHURCH
OAKVILLE, ONTARIO**

- location: town outside of Toronto
- 100 families

The Rev. Darrow Woods is the minister at Trinity United Church in Oakville, Ontario.