

Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ
217th Annual Meeting 2016
2016 GREEN CONGREGATION AWARDS

LEVEL ONE AWARD

Canaan Congregational Church

Canaan, NY

<http://www.canaanucc.org>

Because today's environmental realities call us to examine how we live, members of the Canaan Congregational Church have been working to expand environmental activities in the church and develop sustainability in church life by increasing energy efficiency and conservation, decreasing consumption and waste, and engaging in issues of public policy to advocate for ecological and climate justice. The church is a member of New York Interfaith Power & Light. Canaan church members worked closely with a loosely knit interfaith group of several local congregations (Roman Catholic, Quaker, and Presbyterian), who joined in the three-year-old grassroots action of the Friends Committee on National Legislation (fcnl.org) on a Republican sponsored bill (H.RES. 424) calling upon congress to commit to act to address changes in the climate. In addition to publishing regular newsletter articles on environmental issues and climate change, the church hosted a public forum with speakers from the Berkshire Environmental Action Team and Stop NY Fracked Gas Pipeline. Among the many action steps they accomplished are programmable thermostats, an energy efficient tankless water heater, electronic newsletters, organic lawn care, and environmentally sensitive cleaning products. Canaan Congregational Church is truly living out the values of conservation, advocacy and engagement.

First Congregational Church of Natick

Natick, MA

<http://www.firstchurchnatick.org>

The First Congregational Church in Natick takes a holistic approach to tackling the topics of environmental justice and climate change. Their passionate Green Team includes sub-groups on Physical Plants, Community and Congregational Education, and Advocacy. They regularly preach environmental sermons and children's stories as well as invite outside practitioners to participate in worship or deliver presentations. This consistent attention supports their quarterly Environmental Action Sundays which have focused on topics such as personal sustainability, solar installation, and carbon taxation. Recognizing how their resources are best applied, they proudly partner with town churches as well as local and global organizations. Their Church School even supports a group working to preserve rainforest habitat in Costa Rica, celebrating their mascot, Biscuit the Sloth. They are excitedly preparing to increase their energy efficiency, remedy building envelope issues, and continue this great ministry.

Eliot Church of Newton

Newton, MA

<http://www.eliotchurch.org>

Environmental Stewardship is a shared core value in the congregation at Eliot Church. They take seriously the opportunity to protect God's beautiful creation and address climate change. Eliot examined church energy use in as early as 2003 and made a plan to reduce it by utilizing power strips, programmable thermostats, energy star appliances, and window blinds. They insulated and weatherproofed areas of the building, replaced windows, and transitioned current

incandescent and fluorescent lights to more efficient options. They reduced hot water temperatures to under 120 °F and even replaced their boiler. The results of these tremendous efforts were a 46% reduction in CO₂ emissions achieved by 2014, recognition as a Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light Success Story (go to their website to read more), and an EPA Energy Star rating of 91, meaning that they are more energy efficient than 91 percent of the houses of worship in the country.

First Congregational Church

Stockbridge, MA

<http://www.stockbridgeucc.org>

The Green Team of First Congregational Church in Stockbridge has been meeting monthly to work on greening their buildings and educating the congregation on how to reduce their own carbon footprints. They do periodic energy use surveys of the church buildings and continue to make improvements. They've put office machines on power strips, reduced the temperature of the hot water heater, installed wifi programmable thermostat zones, replaced incandescent lights with CFL's or LED's, installed low flow water fixtures, and even created custom storm windows for the ancient and historic 12 over 12 sash windows in the sanctuary. Targeting behaviors, they have instituted a recycling program, banned Styrofoam cups, and continue to encourage the use of washable dishes and utensils. To reach the broader congregation and community they present an environmental stewardship sermon annually, invite environmentally focused speakers, produce a monthly newsletter column, and provide a weekly "green tip." Last fall they hosted a film festival sponsored by the local 350.org group and had a study group on Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*. They are actively working on Level 2 and 3 and their investment committee has been reviewing options for more environmentally conscious funds.

LEVEL TWO AWARD

First Congregational Church Amherst, UCC

Amherst, MA

<http://www.firstchurchamherst.org>

First Congregational Church's Earth Ministry Team has been busy making upgrades and changes to their property including installing programmable thermostats and energy efficient fluorescent lighting, stopping the use of lawn care chemicals, purchasing clean electric energy, and insulating the building. They now provide a way for members to recycle Styrofoam. However, their real strength appears to be activism. Their congregation made a united decision to divest from fossil fuels in 2015. They blessed and commissioned a member during worship in preparation for his trip to Paris to participate in the UN Conference on Climate Change. Members of the Earth Ministry Team have participated in public hearings about the Kinder Morgan natural gas pipeline, visited state representatives to support carbon tax and rebate bills, and participated in local the Climate Action Now group (350.org MA). Adults and children from the congregation participated in parts of the recent "Taking Steps to a Renewable Future" walk buoyed by prayers from the congregation and members are receiving training to participate in future non-violent climate actions.

Eliot Church of Newton

Newton, MA

<http://www.eliotchurch.org>

The Eliot Church of Newton, UCC's care for creation is not just manifested through their church building, but through their individual behaviors. Eliot formed the Energy Efficiency Evangelists to support and sustain these efforts. They recycle, carpool, have transitioned away from disposable dishes and utensils, and shifted to electronic communications. They celebrate their "green" accomplishments and even have an entire webpage devoted to their work in addressing climate change. On the website you can learn about their work days devoted to cleaning up the Charles River, their screenings of films like "An Inconvenient Truth," and their observation of September as a Season of Creation in Worship and Sunday school. Outside of the church, individuals are encouraged to obtain home energy assessments through Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light as well as lower their personal carbon footprints by engaging in a Lenten carbon fast.

LEVEL THREE AWARD

Eliot Church of Newton

Newton, MA

<http://www.eliotchurch.org>

Because care for creation is one of Eliot Church's core values, they regularly witness to their broader community around creation care and climate justice. Members walked across the Commonwealth in the Interfaith Walk for Climate Rescue organized by Religious Witness for the Earth in 2007. In 2008 they planted 70 trees around Newton in cooperation with the Conference's Mass ReLeaf Ministry, Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light (MIPL), and Andover Newton Theological School. They received the 2010 Leadership by Example Award through MIPL and five members participated in the 2014 People's Climate March. In 2015, a pastor and a member of the church testified at the State House as part of an interfaith delegation in favor of carbon pricing, they worked with 350MA/Newton to host a carbon pricing forum, partnered with MIPL to host a SHOW Workshop, and participated in the Massachusetts Interfaith Coalition for Climate Action. At Eliot Church's fall 2015 congregational meeting, members voted to install solar panels on their roof (hopefully by early summer 2016), to carefully examine their investments in fossil fuels, and to work in the coming year to increase their divestment from fossil fuels from 15 to 20 percent. Creation Care is not just a priority for the adults in the congregation – the last two years have seen multiple Sunday school lessons and hands on service projects on creation care. Eliot Church is dedicated to continually caring for God's creation and responding to climate change through spiritual reflection and preaching, Sunday school curriculum and service, local conservation efforts, and advocacy and witness at the local and state level.