

Green Team in Action at Peace Dale Congregational Church

In March of 2020, the Executive Board at PDCC asked the Missions Board to form a Green Team at the church. Don Hermes initiated the first steps by utilizing resources from the UCC website and other internet sites and by recruiting potentially interested volunteers both from within the church and from the South County Community. A broad based team evolved with members from PDCC, other area churches, and interested environmental groups.

The first Green Team meeting was held on June 18, 2020. Don Hermes and Claudia Swain agreed to serve as co-chairs and Katherine Condon agreed to serve as the recording secretary. A Mission Statement was developed that reflected our goals:

“Our Mission: To promote conservation and environmental practices in our church, our homes, and our communities.”

The team immediately got to work on education and conservation goals. Some early achievements included the following:

- Agendas and minutes, with relevant information were posted on the church webpage <http://www.peacedalechurch.org/> encouraging feedback and opportunities to participate.
- A resource list of useful environmental practices was gathered and goals were set leading to widespread discussion in establishing priorities.
- As a result of these discussions we promoted:
 - Better composting efforts at the church
 - Better instructions on how to properly recycle.
 - Procedures for hazardous waste disposal, at church and at home.
 - Use of more environmentally safe cleaning agents.
- Efforts to improved recycling programs included a field trip to Johnston Landfill site to observe their operation which was replaced, due to COVID, with several on-line virtual field trips made available through the E-light and on the website.
- An updated energy audit was performed by RISE. (Rhode Island Saving Energy) The results showed only marginal potential improvements since early RISE audits had already benefitted PDCC in prior years.
- The Team worked on education, studying and reading a variety of newsworthy articles, books, etc. to update themselves on current developments in the world of environmentalism. We had discussions about causes of climate change, alternate energy sources to fossil fuels, etc. Among other things, we examined the meaning of:
 - The New Green Deal. What is it and what is its relevance? ([The Green New Deal, explained - YouTube](#))
 - The Sunrise Movement. What is it, and what is its relevance? (<https://www.sunrisemovement.org/about/principles>)
 - Community Solar. What is it and what role might it play in our community. ([Community Solar: What is it? | EnergySage](#))

- Claudia Swain launched a collaborative effort with the Education Board at PDCC to have monthly hikes to local outdoor locations to promote environmental awareness and share a love of nature. A few of the early hikes included one to the rocky coastline of Newton Avenue and to Black Point in Narragansett, led by Don Hermes, a second to Conservation Land, led by Gary Smith, and a third to Trustom Pond, led by Peter and Claudia Swain and Tom Mather. Later hikes went to Ninigret Park, The Great Swamp, and Duval Trail on Land Trust property.

Our group supports several endeavors of CARI (Climate Action Rhode Island). We participate in the evaluation and recommendation of legislative representatives and policies supportive of sound environmental programs, and encourage protocols for fossil-fuel divestments by banks and investors, thus encouraging support for green energy alternatives.

For Earth Day in 2021, the Green Team designed an environmental banner promoting climate action, for installation at the front of the church. On a background of trees, the banner said simply:

“Earth God's gift to us Our responsibility to the Future.”

Our most notable accomplishment this year has been the installation of over 100 solar cells on the south facing roof of the educational wing of the church. The installed cells will constitute a 50Kv system capable of providing energy equivalent to the \$14K electrical budget of the church which opens its doors to numerous social justice activities within the community. This project was spearheaded by the Green Team as a cost effective way to generate electricity for the church and drastically reduce our CO2 production by not relying on electricity generated by fossil fuels.

Proposals were obtained from three different companies and Sol Power was selected to work with us on this job. The plan involved installing enough panels to generate almost 100% of our electricity usage. The total cost of the project would be \$113,852 and a grant was obtained which would provide \$35,292. The Green Team, the Executive Board, and the Financial Committee prepared a financial proposal for funding the remainder of the project which was approved by the congregation at the 2021 Annual Meeting.

A capital campaign was begun and almost the entire cost of the project has been raised so far. The energy savings from this installation are projected to cover the cost of the entire system in six years, providing a 20% annual return on our investment. The generated clean energy is equivalent to offsetting the CO2 from driving 2.4 million miles. A spinoff benefit is a \$300 donation to the church from Sol Power for each family who commits to home installation of a solar system. Hence, our effort encourages the broader environmental role within the community beyond the church.

The environmental and economic impact of this project will be not only be a benefit to PDCC but will hopefully serve as a model to the South County community as well. In staying true to our mission, we will continue to strive **“to promote conservation and environmental practices in our church, our homes, and our communities.”**