



Application for Green Sanctuary Accreditation

Congregation Information

Congregation Name	First Parish of Concord
Address	20 Lexington Road, Concord, MA 01742
Web site	www.firstparish.org
Green Sanctuary contact	Jay Barnes, Green Sanctuary Co-Chair
Address	61 Whitney Lane, Boxborough, MA
Phone	617-674-2022
Email	jay@energyrace.com
Minister or Congregation Leader	Gary Smith, Senior Minister Jenny Rankin, Minister

Congregation Profile

(First Parish history and profile adapted from an article by Leslie Perrin Wilson, Concord Free Library Curator and from the First Parish Annual Report.)

First Parish in Concord was first gathered in 1636. In the late 1700's to early 1800's First Parish shifted from it's original Congregational Calvinism towards Unitarianism. The current meetinghouse was built in 1900.

First Parish is a congregation steeped in tradition; Ralph Waldo Emerson was a member and the first president of the UUA was a minister of First Parish. In 772 members with an average weekly attendance of 281. RE enrollment is 347. There are 3 ministers and 16 staff members.

Most parishioners are from Concord (75%) but there are members from Acton (8%), Carlisle (3%), Sudbury (2%), Maynard (2%), Lincoln (2%), Boxborough (1%), Bedford (1%), Arlington (1%), Lexington, Harvard, Wayland, Belmont, Groton, Athol, Littleton, Clinton, Lancaster, West Boylston, Princeton, Stow, Chelmsford, Waltham and Wellesley.

In 2008, First Parish began a renovation/expansion project of the RE wing of the meetinghouse. This project will make us ADA compliant and give us more space for our RE programs.

First Parish conducts a broad array of vibrant programs some of which have even become models for other UUA parishes. For example, the RE program designed a "workshop rotation model" of spiritual exploration with custom designed and decorated rooms to match.

There are strong educational programs for adults as well as children. The Wright Tavern Center for Spiritual Renewal held 114 classes and seminars for parishioners and the general public last year. Sunday morning forums, except during the recent renovations, have for many years, covered a broad array of topics related to social justice, the environment, and ethical/moral issues.

Social Action is a strong and vital part of church life at First Parish, and is considered by many members to be an extremely important part of their spiritual expression. A new Social Action Board was created a year ago to oversee existing social action programs and create new ones. There is a part time Social Action Coordinator, who acts as staff to the Board and programs. The church has committed 7.5% of its total operating budget to social action, most of which funds social action grants.

The Social Action Committee distributed approximately \$60,000 in grants this year, ran the Open Table meal and pantry program, held a Crop Walk, ran a film series on diversity, and organized significant donations of fuel assistance, clothing and linens to homeless families in Lowell.

First Parish started the Jericho Road program that helps train organizations that serve the disadvantaged in Lowell MA and this program is in the process of being replicated for Worcester.

There were youth trips to help with hurricane victims in Biloxi and New Orleans, to El Salvador and Transylvania. The choir visited our partner church in Transylvania. The music program is astonishing with the bell choir, children's choir, gospel choir and an array of musicians (guests and parishioners) contributing music in an assortment of styles. There are several services where the choir takes a day off and the youth choose and perform the music.

There are 16 affinity groups ranging from bridge and italian to Jewish awareness and photography.

Congregational Vote

On June 14th, 2009, First Parish convened its Annual Meeting at 11:30am moderated by Loretta Ho Sherblom, member of the Standing Committee. After existing business was concluded, the meeting moved to new business and a proposal that the congregation formally vote to act as a UUA Green Sanctuary. Ms. Sherblom recognized Jay Barnes. Mr. Barnes described the UUA accreditation process, the various focus areas within GS, First Parish's history with GS and then proposed the following statement:

"First Parish in Concord pledges our personal and congregational commitment to live and act as a UUA Green Sanctuary:

1. to incorporate the Seventh Principle values and practices into our worship services, celebrations, religious education programs, church operations and personal lives;
2. to live lightly on the Earth and strive to continually improve our environmental impact;
3. to affirm and promote programs to raise the awareness of human behaviors that affect the health and sustainability of the living Earth."

The statement was moved, seconded and voted favorably. [Editor's note: there were no dissenting votes.]

Completion of Action Plan

Worship and Celebration Projects (2 required)

Project Title:

Missa Gaia (Earth Mass)

Project Description and Action:

The "celebration of the Earth with a mass" took place at First Parish on May 3rd. It was a large undertaking that involved a great many: our ministers wrote Earth-themed sermons and selected readings, the sexton's staff decorated the church with birch tree branches, and most importantly, the music director and the chorus worked with 6 musicians to perform a breathtakingly beautiful mass complete with wolf, whale and seal calls. The congregation was moved in a way not often seen each Sunday. It took the congregation an extra 10 minutes to file out of the sanctuary - no one wanted to leave.

This was the most recent of the special services the ministers and members of First Parish have put together over the past several years. There is a tradition of celebrating the beauty of the Earth every spring with wonderful music and words. What was, perhaps, unique about this year's Missa Gaia Service was that it contained acknowledgement that terrible things are now happening to the Earth that urgently require awareness, understanding, and environmental activism.

Timeline for Completion:

The Earth Mass was completed on May 3rd, 2009.

Outcomes:

The congregation is newly inspired and energized to do more to protect the environment and we all feel a bit closer to each other. Our Minister Gary Smith in his self-deprecating way quoted a recent news clip saying that Unitarian Universalism is like non-alcoholic beer., “an insult to both”. On May 3rd, we transcended our neutrality on dogma to make a strong statement of celebration and concern for the earth.

Lead:

Elizabeth Norton, Music Director.

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Project Title:

Earth Day Service

Project Description and Action:

Our Earth Day service was a service in addition to the Missa Gaia described above. The Children’s Message spoke of water conservation. Our RE Director spoke about water use around the world and the average use of 1 gallon per day per person in Venezuela. She then asked the children how many gallons they thought people used per day in Concord. Five? Ten? Twenty? Fifty? The answer was 75 and she had several people come into the sanctuary with 75 empty 1 gallon milk jugs and sit them down next to the 1 gallon milk jug that represented Venezuela.

The Social Action Candle Lighting which each week highlights a congregant’s experience with social action this week featured two congregants (one at 9am and one at 11am) and their fight against global warming. Each ended their remarks with an invitation to the congregation to gather in a nearby field for a (an) aerial photograph of the group standing in the shape of “350” in honor of 350.org.

The sermon, written and preached by Margie King Saphier, Associate Minister, drew an interesting parallel between Galileo and Pope Urban VIII’s conflict of world views in the 1600’s and the conflicts (hopefully drawing to a close) between environmentalists and industrialists on whether humans are causing climate change. Galileo’s new world view was that the Earth was not the center of the universe, the sun was. This was a threat to the power of the catholic church and that of the Pope.

The sermon challenged the Pope Urban VIII in us that protects the status quo, our comforts, luxuries and economic power in the face of the scientific evidence that we are creating catastrophic changes in the Earth’s climate.

Margie ended this way:

“We need to be like Galileo and be just as determined and passionate to bring to the world new paradigms based in science that support the interdependence of all existence. Like Julia Butterfly,

we need to be spiritual warriors and turn our negative judgments and hatred toward love – unconditional love so that we too can be transformed by experiencing the flow of love of Creation.

May it be so.”

Timeline for Completion:

Completed April 26, 2009.

Outcomes:

An increased awareness of the challenges that confront the environment and the importance of the 7th Principle of Unitarian Universalism.

Lead:

Margie King Saphier

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Religious Education Projects (2 required, 1 for children and 1 for adults)

Project Title:

Garbage Sorting/Recycling (children)

Project Description and Action:

For Earth Day 2008, we brought a bag of garbage (pre-screened for safety) into the classroom and had the students examine the garbage. What was each piece made of? Paper, plastic, metal or organic material? Where do those materials come from? What happens when they get thrown away? How long does the plastic, for example, sit in the earth before it “goes away”? The children were able to see that much of the contents of the bag of garbage was recyclable and much of it was paper-based. At the end of the class we placed an orange peel and a piece of plastic into a glass jar full of dirt. This year we will show them the jar of dirt and take a look at what happened to the orange peel and what happened to the piece of plastic.

Timeline for Completion:

The first class was held in April 2008. The followup class to review the results of our composting experiment will be held in this fall.

Outcomes:

The children, who were already very familiar with recycling, have a better appreciation for what our garbage is made from and what happens to it if it is not recycled.

Lead:

Jay Barnes

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Project Title:

Bill McKibben Talk (adults)

Project Description and Action:

First Parish Green Sanctuary was a co-sponsor and promoter of a talk by Bill McKibben in Concord on November 21st. Mr. McKibben, a noted environmental activist and author, gave an inspiring talk before a standing room only audience at the Trinitarian Congregational Church in Concord.

Mr. McKibben’s talk focused on 350.org, or rather, a campaign to get Earth’s CO2 levels back to 350 parts per million from our current 387 ppm. He was a powerful speaker who both educated the audience on our current situation and what’s coming for us if we don’t act.

Timeline for Completion:

Completed November 21, 2008 though there are a series of followup events that are taking place as a result of this one.

Outcomes:

The creation of a local 350.org group working to organize, educate and energize the Concord community around the 350 ppm goal.

Lead:

Bob Andrews

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Project Title:

Co-Sponsorship of Concord 350.org Actions

Project Description and Action:

The First Parish Green Sanctuary Committee joined with ConcordCAN as a Co-Sponsor of a very well attended talk by Bill McKibben in Concord in November, 2008. In his remarks at that time, McKibben described his 350.org movement, aimed at influencing the outcome of an international climate change treaty in Copenhagen this coming December. He explained that 350 parts per million is a “safe” carbon content for our atmosphere and that we are now at more than 380 parts per million.

Following the McKibben talk, there was a brainstorming event in Concord for people who had received his message. Creative ideas were generated for local actions in support of 350.org. First Parish Green Sanctuary was a co-sponsor of the brainstorming event and helped to publicize it within the church.

On April 26, a 350 action took place at Heywood Meadow in Concord Center. Almost 200 people gathered and formed a giant “350” with their bodies on the field. This was photographed from the elevated bucket of a truck bucket; and the photo was published in local media, with a story explaining the reason for it, as well as on the 350.org website. First Parish Green Sanctuary and

Social Action urged church members to participate. Many, in fact, did. The candle lightings in the church services that day (a special "Earth Day" service) were carried out by two First Parish members who are also members of the ConcordCAN Steering Committee. They gave inspirational messages, stating why participating in such an event was important to them, reflecting their UU values.

Timeline for Completion:

The Heywood Meadow event was completed on April 26, 2009. Green Sanctuary support of 350 actions will, however, continue, culminating in a very large action planned at the historic "Old North Bridge" on October 24. This is an international day of action, coming soon before the international climate change conference in Copenhagen in December.

Outcomes:

These actions have contributed a great deal to raised consciousness in Concord about the significance and importance of 350.org. While hard to quantify, the number of people who are involved with the climate change issue and ready to act appears to be growing substantially. Along with awareness that this is a very serious and urgent issue to address, there is a sense of excitement about participating in a grassroots movement aimed at legislative action on a global basis.

Lead:

Bob Andrews and Debbie Barr were leads from within our church for the April 26 event at Heywood Meadow. Bob Andrews, Andy Proulx, and Jill Appel, all First Parish members, currently serve as Co-Chairs of ConcordCAN. See the next item below.

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Project Title:

Facilitate the Establishment of a Local Climate Action Organization

Project Description and Action:

In the spring of 2007, after a highly successful Global Warming Symposium and Fair in which First Parishioners played a big part in planning and presenting, it was decided that Concord should have a community-wide meeting with the many environmentally engaged groups in Concord to look at future directions and coordination for global warming activism in Concord.

At that meeting FP/Green Sanctuary members were very active in achieving a consensus with other community groups that there be an independent, volunteer-led climate change organization in the community. This led to the launching of ConcordCAN, the Concord Climate Action Network, in the summer of 2008. Concord CAN is now a growing and dynamic local organization, with a large number of First Parish members serving on its Steering Group. Andy Proulx and Bob Andrews, the two Green Sanctuary Co-Chairs during 2006-2007, are both Co-Chairs of the organization, along with another First Parish member, Jill Appel.

The First Parish Social Action Community, via its Grants Committee, has now funded ConcordCAN for two years, contributing a total of \$3,500 to the new organization, which has done major consciousness-raising in the community about climate change, peak oil, greenhouse gas emissions, and the need to develop local sustainability and energy efficiency programs. It has

also begun to become an important advocate in the community for climate change movements such as the current 350.Org movement founded by Bill McKibben.

Timeline for Completion:

This project was undertaken with an “as long as it takes” attitude, with the understanding that a great deal of work needed to be done. It could be considered to have been completed when ConcordCAN was launched in the summer of 2008.

Outcomes:

Concord now has an active and growing climate action organization; and First Parish has unofficially taken a leading role in establishing it. Community awareness and understanding of the important issue of climate change and how it can be addressed at the local level has been greatly expanded. First Parish has contributed both important leadership and funding for this community activism. We have never claimed ownership of it, We have worked collaboratively with other community groups while making participation available to any First Parish members who have displayed an active interest.

Lead:

Bob Andrews, a Green Sanctuary member and Co-Chair, took a leading role in pulling together the new organization after a series of community brainstorming meetings and a highly successful Global Warming Symposium and Fair in March, 2007. Nine members of the current ConcordCAN Steering Group are First Parish members: Bob Andrews, Jill Appel, Debbie Barr, Enid Boasberg, Berni Jenkins, Mark Myles, Lori Pazaris, Jim Pazaris, Andy Proulx. They have all make strong contributions to this ongoing project.

Environmental Justice (2 required, 1 long-term that **actively** promotes justice for those affected by environmental injustices and creates relationships)

Project Title:

Concord Cares Weatherization

Project Description:

First Parish promoted and participated in a program that pulls together volunteers who go to low-income families that are having trouble making ends meet and weatherize their homes with window insulation, door sweeps, weather stripping and outlet insulation. It is ironic that the families with the least amount of income are often the least able to take advantage of ways of reducing their home heating bill. The fact that the heating bill reductions also help the environment is a nice side benefit.

Timeline for Completion:

Weatherization work was conducted and completed in January and March of 2009.

Outcomes:

The weatherized homes are much more comfortable and less expensive to heat. The weatherizers and low-income families got to know each other and made connections that would not have occurred otherwise.

Lead:

Berni Jenkins

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Project Title:

Free CFLs for Low-Income Families

Project Description:

Inspired by First Parish sermons, Green Sanctuary and the First Parish Jericho Road program, a First Parish Green Sanctuary member created a non-profit (LiveCooler.org) that collects donations from individuals and corporations that want to offset their carbon footprint and purchases and installs free CFLs (compact fluorescent lightbulbs) in the homes of low-income families. The families get lower electricity bills for 5-10 years and lower electricity use fights global warming and improves the local air quality. Asthma rates among poorer urban families are higher particularly where coal-burning power plants and other fossil fuel burning industries are creating smog and particulates. The LiveCooler program improves urban air quality and lowers electric bills.

Using this idea of creating a local community benefit while helping the environment helped LiveCooler attract funding from Boston College, ClearChannel Radio, ESurance, Massachusetts Democratic Party and the Boston Marathon.

Timeline for Completion:

LiveCooler was started in June of 2007 and the program is ongoing.

Outcomes:

So far, over 6000 CFLs have been installed in low-income homes in Boston, Malden, Worcester, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Washington DC, West Virginia and Colorado. The bulbs are saving 1,500 families over \$400,000 in electricity bills. Over 800 tons of CO2 won't be created by burning coal. The low-income families have been educated about global warming and CFL recycling as part of the bulb install.

Lead:

Jay Barnes

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Sustainable Living (4 required, 1 that addresses energy conservation)

Project Title:

Waterless urinals, extra low flow toilets and faucets.

Project Description and Action:

As part of the renovation work being done at First Parish, the construction committee, in consultation with several First Parish LEED architects implemented a series of sustainability measures. The first being waterless urinals for the toilets in the church.

Water usage for Americans in general is highly disproportional to the amount of water used throughout the world. Our new waterless urinals take a big step towards lowering our water usage.

Timeline for Completion:

Completed Spring 2009.

Outcomes:

The bathroom's water usage has been reduced by 50%.

Lead: Sergio Siani and Peter Nobile

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Project Title:

Incandescent bulb replacement

Project Description and Action:

Incandescent bulbs in the administrative and parish hall areas of the church were switched over to CFL bulbs. Concord has a good CFL recycling program that will handle these bulbs at end of life.

Timeline for Completion:

Some of the CFLs got de-installed during the construction project. They will be replaced this fall.

Outcomes:

An estimated 6% reduction in electricity usage each month.

Lead:

Doug Baker.

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Project Title:

High efficiency window installation in the Religious Education and administrative offices wing.

Project Description and Action:

Double pane, argon filled, low E windows are being installed in the RE and admin office wing of the church.

Timeline for Completion:

September 2009

Outcomes:

These windows will significantly reduce our use of oil to heat the building.

Lead:

Sergio Siani and Peter Nobile.

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Project Title:

Re-planting of the Lawn with Eco-Lawn Grass Seed

Project Description and Action:

Standard grass seed needs consistent watering, regular fertilizer and insecticide treatment and needs to be mowed once a week. If the lawn is a large one, the lawn mower is most likely a gas-powered mower that does not have a catalytic converter to reduce pollutants.

Due to the renovation/construction work at First Parish, we had the opportunity to replant the lawn. By showing the ecological benefits and financial benefits of switching to the Eco-Lawn grass seed, we convinced the construction committee and the business staff that it was the right choice.

Eco-Lawn grass seed is one of many slow-growing, deep-rooted grass seeds on the market. Their deep roots (9" - 12") means that the grass gets the nutrients and water it needs without supplemental applications. The fact that the grass grows slowly means that 20 lawn mowing sessions during the year (at roughly \$200 each) can be reduced to just 4 lawn mowing sessions: a savings of \$3,200 per year.

Timeline for Completion:

Completed in June 2009

Outcomes:

The eco-lawn will save First Parish ~\$5,000 per year in maintenance costs and will save ~40,000 gallons of water per year.

Lead:

Jay Barnes with Jill Appel and Caroline McCloy.

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Additional (2 required, these can relate to the program elements of your choice)

Project Title:

Green Sanctuary Communications System

Project Description and Action:

In the church year 2007-2008, Church Communication was identified by the Green Sanctuary Committee as one important focus for program development. The following general goals were adopted:

1. To establish and use effectively channels for communicating with the congregation and the wider community about environmental issues and sustainable living strategies.
2. To keep the congregation informed about environmental actions initiated by the committee, recruit participation in our program actions, and motivate people to take personal actions that are environmentally meaningful.
3. To encourage participation in collaborative environmental initiatives with other churches and community organizations.

Specific action goals were:

- Make the Green Sanctuary website more visible and accessible to all Green Sanctuary members, as well as the larger congregation.
- Keep the contents fresh with interesting, informative, and up-to-date news about current events, environmental articles, and resource information pertaining to the environment and global warming.
- Establish a connection between the Green Sanctuary website and the new Concord Conserves website, which is an environmental website for the Town of Concord.
- The website is managed by a First Parish member. Links to Green Sanctuary should be established for town-wide visibility.
- Secure a bulletin board space for Green Sanctuary in the lower church hall, adjacent to the Parish Hall where people gather for Sunday coffee hours and many other church events.
- Publicize the Green Sanctuary website on this bulletin board and keep up-to-date with event notifications and other informative materials.
- Make Green Sanctuary a regular and frequent presence at exhibit tables in the Parish Hall during Sunday coffee hours.
- Share general environmental information and information about current Green Sanctuary activities; sign up new people to be involved with the committee; offer face-to-face discussions with parishioners about our environmental work.
- Plan and implement a series of speakers and/or films throughout the year on environmental topics, calling upon outside and inside experts to share their knowledge and motivate more people to become environmental activists.

Timeline for Completion:

Completed by June, 2008

Outcomes:

By the end of the year, the website was being updated regularly with new material and had been widely publicized through email groups and bulletin board postings. The website address was printed on cards and committee brochures. The website is still maintained by Green Sanctuary member Peter Norton.

Links were established in both directions between the Green Sanctuary website and the Concord Conserves website.

Bulletin board space in the lower hall was secured and was being updated regularly and frequently. It continues to the present date.

Coffee hour tables in the Parish Hall, featuring information about Green Sanctuary activities and environmental issues, were initiated as of 12/09/07 and continued throughout the year. People were being added to our Green Sanctuary email group, and those who might be interested in participating in specific activities were being identified. A Sunday evening forum at the church featured a UU minister/environmentalist trained by Al Gore talking about global warming; The movie "Out of Balance," documenting the powerful role of Exxon Mobil in shaping governmental energy policies, was shown in a community building and co-sponsored with another local organization. Green Sanctuary collaborated with the Sunday Morning Forum on presentations about the Low Carbon Diet and the carbon footprint of the church.

The existing Google Group email system was updated and expanded, and was used extensively for informing people about "green" events and issues.

Lead:

Bob Andrews

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Project Title:

Old Sneaker Recycling Program

Project Description and Action:

Barbara Wheeler, a key person in the implementation of the First Parish recycling program, heard about a program sponsored by Nike where old sneakers are collected and Nike pays to grind them up and turn them into material used to make artificial tracks at high schools and colleges.

In conjunction with the RE program, kids and parents were encouraged to bring in old sneakers that might ordinarily be thrown in the trash. It was a great opportunity to get the kids thinking about where garbage goes when it's thrown away and what better disposal options there might be.

Timeline for Completion:

April 2008

Outcomes:

9 cubic feet of sneakers were collected and sent to Nike for recycling.

Lead:

Barbara Wheeler

Accomplishment of Program Goals

(Please type in this section and describe, in detail, the degree to which you have achieved the each of the five Green Sanctuary Program goals with your program (please address each goal separately; each would ideally be 1-3 paragraphs each).)

1. To build awareness of societal environmental issues among UU's.

First Parish is a very ecologically aware and engaged community. Through countless programs such as a Coffee Hour footprint calculator, Coffee Hour eco-quiz, guest speakers, film screenings, sermons drawing on the transcendentalist movement's focus on nature, LEED-guided construction techniques on our building, the Earth-focused RE curriculum for 2008-2009, Earth Day services, and the Missa Gaia, eco-rallies, recycling our Sunday service programs, etc., First Parish has achieved a high degree of awareness of the environmental issues we face.

2. To generate commitment for personal lifestyle changes.

In our sermons we have spoken of the inherent tension between sustainable living and our personal lifestyles but at First Parish we have made great progress in adjusting our lifestyles. On any given Sunday, one can look out at the parking lot and see a dozen hybrid cars. Many in First Parish have adopted sustainability as not only their lifestyle but their profession. Our membership includes LEED architects, organic landscapers, EPA staffers, organic cotton activists, vegan cooking advocates, local food promoters, carbon credit registry organizers, energy efficiency consultants, climate action activists, business sustainability consultants, green developers and leaders in numerous local ecology groups.

3. To motivate UU's to community action on environmental issues.

First Parishioners have provided important leadership in an array of local environmental groups: Reusit, Inc., Concord Climate Action, Concord Conserves, Green Acton, Boxborough EcoPath, LiveCooler, Musketaquid and a local 350.org group. Browsing

ConcordConserves.org (a site created by First Parishioners) gives one a good idea of town focus on the environment.

Two examples of local community action are Concord Reusit's DropOff/SwapOff, one of the most popular town events of the year, and the Concord Municipal Light Plant CFL program which reimburses any resident up to \$5 for each CFL purchased.

4. To build a connection between spiritual practice and environmental consciousness.

Aided by a natural spiritual focus on nature that comes from First Parish's Transcendentalist tradition, First Parish's readings and sermons often link spiritual practice and the environment. Until recently there has been a tendency for us to focus on the link between our spirituality and environmental consciousness without pointing out the environmental threats we face.

An initiative led by the First Parish Music Director, a performance of the Missa Gaia, was a big breakthrough. The whale and seal sounds, the voices of our choir, combined with words from our ministers on the parts of nature that are dying, made a powerful impact.

With a big push from a former GS co-chair, Bob Andrews, we are now looking at ways to take our concern for the environment to the next level.

5. To build awareness of and rectify environmental injustices.

This program area is the hardest to tackle but we have done so with four main thrusts:

- a. We have participated in a program to winterize low-income family homes. Like many old American homes, the homes were built assuming that fossil fuels were plentiful, inexpensive and harmless. So these low-income families live in draughty, cold homes. The weatherization provided reduces their heating bills and also helps the environment by burning less oil.
- b. Awareness programs (speakers, films, etc.) that describe the impact of climate change on people around the world.
- c. Work crews sent to help New Orleans and Biloxi recover from Katrina.
- d. A First Parishioner has worked to install CFL bulbs in the homes of urban-based low-income families. These families are the ones at highest risk of asthma from the smog and particulates that come from our power and transportation systems. The CFL bulbs reduce the coal burned in our power plants as well and reduce their electricity bills.

Program Evaluation

(Please type in this section and evaluate, in detail, the effect the Green Sanctuary Program has had on your congregation. Please address each question separately; each would ideally be 1-3 paragraphs each.)

What do you believe has been the most important benefit your congregation has gained as a result of your participation in the Green Sanctuary Program?

A framework and a goal around which to organize our efforts to fight climate change and to live more sustainably. Earth's current environmental problems are so enormous that it can be overwhelming and the Green Sanctuary program has helped us keep our focus.

What has been the most difficult or challenging aspect of the program for your congregation to achieve?

In any congregation there is a diversity of opinion that must be dealt with. And ultimately Green Sanctuary is about change which does not come easy. When the question is should we help winterize low-income family homes, it's a straightforward answer. When the question is should we make efficiency changes that affect aesthetics or comfort the answer is more difficult. Ultimately we have proceeded with an approach that says that we will make improvements as we go and that everything does not have to be black and white.

Have you been able to discern positive changes in your congregation's culture as a result of the activities you accomplished? If so, what are they?

The best example of the positive changes in our culture was that when we voted at our annual meeting this year to live and act as a Green Sanctuary, the vote was unanimous and a round of applause ensued. One could imagine several years ago that the wording of the statement we were voting on would have been debated. For example, "Why does it apply to our personal lives as well as congregational lives?".

What are your intentions/aspirations for continuing to live out your Green Sanctuary commitments?

We have just begun a conversation with our Minister on how we can take our activities to the next level. We hope to make environmental concerns even more central to what we do at the church. We will have a plan by Sept/Oct of 2009.

We are also using the key 350.org date in October as a due date for several community events.

What on-going role do you expect your congregation will take in the wider community relative to environmental issues? How do you feel recognition as a Green Sanctuary affects your position in the community?

First Parish should continue to take a large role in the wider community, a role which is described in detail above. But one important change is the self confidence that GS Accreditation will give us. We have tended to look more at what we haven't been able to accomplish rather than what we have accomplished. The forward momentum we would receive from GS Accreditation will be very helpful and will strengthen our voice in the Concord community.