

Kent UCC celebrates Creation Justice Church designation

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Recently the United Church of Christ of Kent, Ohio, received the designation as a Creation Justice Church. The United Church of Christ's (UCC) program assists congregations in making the mission of environmental justice an integral strand in the DNA of their faith community.

Their journey to earn this designation began in late 2019 with the initiation of a "Green Team." Due to the Covid pandemic their work got off to a slow start, but they worked hard to educate fellow congregants on ways to reduce their carbon footprint at home and at church. Working with other ministries in the church they helped implement new practices that not only cut expenses but also reduced waste. Emphasis on care for creation is part of the church services regularly, as well as an annual Creation Justice Service. They engage in ongoing education and advocacy for the environment. Ultimately, they wrote and adopted a Creation Justice Covenant to guide their vow to care for creation and work for justice for those oppressed by abuse of it.

"This congregation understands creation as a gift of God to be cherished rather than as a resource to be consumed," shared Rev. Amy Gopp, senior minister. "We seek to ensure that creation justice is upheld in our theology, worship, practices, congregational life, and our outreach to the wider community and world. Our calling is one of urgency and great resolve. We only have one planet home."

The church has adopted a Green Church Pledge that includes zero use of Styrofoam products, minimal use of paper products, reduction of food waste by distributing leftovers to those in need and composting, recycling, and reducing water usage by using a dishwasher rather than hand washing. For example, they now use fabric napkins and table coverings instead of plastic or paper. They also intentionally purchase Equal Exchange products to promote economic equity and sustainable development. Lighting throughout the building has been changed to LED bulbs and they have moved to using battery powered tools for landscape maintenance. In 2024 a Sustainability Task Force completed an audit of all functions of their building and grounds and made recommendations to improve their carbon footprint. Proposed changes are now being implemented, as well as being used for future planning.

At home congregants have implemented changes to their daily life such as using laundry sheets instead of liquid soap in plastic containers. They use fabric napkins and rags instead of paper products, battery powered tools, recycle and use "green" cleaning products, etc. Some have implemented composting of food and yard scraps. They have also been encouraged to stop using perfumed products and chemical herbicides and pesticides. To encourage changes in personal practices the Green Team has given out product samples and educational materials.

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