

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the New River Valley
Environmental Justice/Climate Change Team**

Annual Report May 2023

Co-Chairs and members: Co-chairs Robert Stimson, Anita Puckett; Members: KC Arceneaux, Dick Bauman, Robin Cosley, Ashley Dugan, Lisa Evanylo, Scott Fralin, Alan Heath, Sarah Myers Jones, Steve Keighton, Jim Kern, Jami McQuain, Jamie McReynolds, Wayne Neu, Tim Pickering, Walter Pirie, Helen Renquist, Janet Sawyers, Polly Stimson, Anna Tulou, Julianna Walker

Purpose of the Team: To engage in environmental justice and climate justice activities falling within the scope of the mission of this Unitarian Universalist congregation through asserting the worth and dignity of all beings through an affirmation of the value and *necessary* healthy and vibrant continuation of this planet as we live and propagate on it. This purpose differs from the specific purposes currently defined on the UU website (https://uucnr.org/justice/environmental_justice) as they need revision and updating.

Achievements: Meetings of team members via Zoom five times to organize and develop goals and a common purpose. We hosted two speakers: Russell Chishom of Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights (POWHR) on February 14 and Emily Piontek from Appalachian Voices on March 14. In addition, Stimson, via video recording, and Puckett, in person, spoke before the congregation during the April 16, 2023, service. This activity generated a seven person increase in team membership to 22. Stimson also organized a polypropylene tote bag with UU logo purchase campaign for the congregation. These bags are more environmentally sound and last longer than the usual grocery cloth bags available in grocery stores.

Lessons learned: Attendance at Zoom meetings has been uneven; selecting a meeting time that fits the schedules of more members is needed. Even so, it is likely that attendance for many will be sporadic due to other time commitments. A method for involving more members in projects needs to be developed. Also, it has been difficult to develop clear projects and goals because of the many interests expressed by team members. Goals and focus need attention.

How does the team work to further our mission and vision? The team supports our mission by seeking and then engaging in environmental justice projects and causes as well as in reducing the impact of negative climate change locally and on the planet as a whole. As such, it clearly supports principle #7, "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." In its implicit desire to treat all life as having positive value and fair and just treatment, it also affirms principle #6, "The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all." Finally, the team members assert that all of our efforts must and will advance our vision and mission to transform our local and global community "through courageous love" that brings hope, revitalization, and substantiation to the planet and the species, including us, living in it.

Goals for the coming year and how do they further our mission and vision?

Many of our goals still need to be firmed up and made actionable. However, they are

- ❖ Editing and revising the congregation's website page on Environmental Justice;
- ❖ Renewing our status as a green sanctuary congregation
- ❖ Providing oversight on energy reduction measures currently identified from the UUC energy audit;
- ❖ Energy usage assessments for the homes of congregants and distribution of information on how to reduce energy usage for each home;
- ❖ Lobbying the Montgomery School Board and organizing community members to push for solar panels on Montgomery County Schools;
- ❖ Developing collaborations with environmental justice and climate change organizations (e.g., Sierra Club, Appalachian Voices, and Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights) for addressing projects that will benefit the local and regional climate and environmental needs of the region, nation, and planet;
- ❖ Developing a speaker series for the congregation and larger community that will inform disseminate information on local environmental justice/climate change actions and on various environmental justice/climate change topics;
- ❖ Preparing our own materials for posting to the congregational website and other information dissemination venues; and
 - ❖ Constructing relationships with appropriate Unitarian Universalist Association committees and groups as part of our green sanctuary congregation efforts.

All of these activities further our mission and vision by promoting a spiritual stance of transcendence and communion towards saving the planet and those entities living on it.

Prepared by
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May 16, 2023