

How to Start a Green Team at Your Church

This guide will help you set up a Green Team at your church and will equip your congregation to become more effective in caring for God's Creation. Green Teams expand environmental activities in our churches and help congregations to connect their faith with sustainable living. This guide offers a variety of specific activities from which you can select the ones that best match your church's level of energy and engagement.

What is a Green Team?

A Green Team (or Environmental Stewardship Team, or Creation Care Committee) is a core group of people in a congregation who are committed to raising awareness about the urgent need to protect God's Creation and to work for environmental sustainability and responsibility. Green Teams develop sustainability in church life by increasing energy efficiency and conservation, decreasing consumption and waste, and, if possible, encouraging the use of clean, safe, renewable energy. Your group may also choose to engage in issues of public policy and to advocate for ecological and climate justice.

The Importance of a Green Team

Every congregation can find ways to better preserve and protect God's Creation as an aspect of faithful discipleship. Forming a group that can inspire, implement and/or oversee environmental progress in your church is essential for long-term success. A Green Team avoids burnout by dividing and sharing tasks. By praying together and by creating opportunities to reflect on how protecting God's Creation connects with their faith, Green Team members can offer each other a sense of community and moral support. A group also shows church decision-makers that there is a constituency that supports real change.

Starting a Green Team

To start a Green Team, begin by talking to friends within your congregation that might be interested in forming the core group with you. Talk with your clergy and staff to gauge their level of interest and support. Be sure to speak with whoever is in charge of facilities; begin to form alliances and to develop an understanding of how the church buildings work. Once you have gathered several committed people, announce the first meeting in your church's bulletin and during announcement time at worship services. Your Green Team can include any number of people, as long as you conduct meetings and choose projects that keep your scale in mind.

What should we do during our first meeting?

Organize a potluck if the group is small enough! Invite everyone to share what led him or her to come to this meeting. Discuss goals and brainstorm possible projects, drawing on the suggestions below, if desired. **Choose your first project**, and set up a basic plan for how to complete it, with delegated tasks. Then set up a time to meet regularly to check in with one another.

What should we choose as our first project?

During your first meeting, after brainstorming, choose one project that can be quickly and inexpensively accomplished so that you build confidence and create momentum within your team. Be sure to consider the energy and interest of your group, the pace of change within your congregation, and how much support you have from clergy and staff.

Initial projects to make church life more sustainable:

There are many different ways to start treading more lightly on God's green Earth. Below are a number of possible activities. Consider this a guide to prompt brainstorming for your own congregation, rather than a checklist.

- Set up a bulletin board and post news articles and photos that relate to Creation care.
- Provide Eco-Tips for publication in your church's service leaflets or newsletters.
- Minimize waste during coffee hour by replacing Styrofoam cups with mugs.
- Connect your church with local recycling, composting, or e-waste resources.
- Replace incandescent lighting with CFL bulbs and LED lights for your Exit signs.
- Transition church land to organic greenscaping or community gardens.
- Organize carpools to church services and events.
- Encourage local, organic, and vegetarian-friendly foods at church events.
- Ditch bottled water and serve tap water at church events.
- Conduct an energy audit through your local utility company, or with the assistance of Interfaith Power & Light.

...or anything else! Be creative. Choose something fun.

Further Green Team Projects:

In addition to the ideas above, here is an expanded list of projects that could supplement "greening" church life by further engaging church members in environmental and climate justice:

- Encourage your pastor to preach about climate change and to develop special worship services that honor God's Creation. Celebrate an annual Creation Sunday, or an entire Season of Creation.
- Host a movie night for your church and your local community. Watch a film like "Renewal," "Chasing Ice," or "A Climate of TRUST," and hold a discussion afterwards.

- Host a 100-Mile Potluck, in which as many foods as possible are grown or produced within 100 miles of the church.
- Join your local chapter of Interfaith Power & Light and help your church to save money while it saves energy.
- Build relationships with other groups in the congregation. Encourage Sunday School programs, Bible camps, adult education programs, and spiritual retreats that focus on care for God's Creation.
- Support local green energy through a program such as MassEnergy in Massachusetts.
- Install solar panels on your church's roof.
- If your congregation has an endowment, work with the investments committee to divest from fossil fuels.
- Encourage everyone to join the climate movement and to sign up to receive newsletters from your local climate action group, such as 350MA.org in Massachusetts.
- Organize church field trips to witness the beauty of creation and to participate in rallies.
- When circumstances call for it, participate in nonviolent civil disobedience or ease the financial burden of people who choose this step.
- Reach out to other churches in your area. Create an ecumenical event.

How can I make our Green Team more effective?

As you consider ways to improve the work of your team, you might consider the following questions:

- Are you **accomplishing the goals** you have set for yourselves?
- Are you **meeting regularly** (even if only once per month)?
- Do you have a **sense of community commitment**?
- If your goals are proving elusive, are you able as a group to **set new goals and to analyze errors** without blame or despair?
- Are you **welcoming newcomers**, and do you accommodate differing interests and schedules?

Tips for Success:

Focus on achievable, incremental changes. Don't try to do everything at once. Let engagement grow like a mustard seed.

Don't be bashful! When your Team is graced with successful completion of a project, share this in your church announcements. Use the church website and banners to inspire others and potentially to attract newcomers. Reach out to regional denominational leaders. If your Green Team achieves something major, like divesting from fossil fuels or building a community garden, contact your local media!

Connect action and education. Combine a movie night on plastics with efforts to reduce your congregation's consumption of petroleum-based products. If your church joins a compost pick-up, let church-members know that they can do the same in their own homes.

Continue to reflect on how this work connects to the values of our faith.

Whatever you decide to do, have a blast doing it! Let it bring your church together.

Scriptural Resources:

“No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” –Matthew 5:15-16

“Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” – Matthew 18:19-20

“Again he said, “What shall we say the kingdom of God is like, or what parable shall we use to describe it? It is like a mustard seed, which is the smallest of all seeds on earth. Yet when planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants, with such big branches that the birds can perch in its shade.” –Mark 4:30-32

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” –Romans 8:19-21

“The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.” –Psalm 24:1-2

Web Resources:

See Interfaith Power & Light for many other ways to connect your congregation with environmental stewardship (<http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>), and look at your statewide branch (<http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/about/state/>).

Further actions for greening your church from Eco-Justice Ministries (<http://www.eco-justice.org/Greening-basics.asp>).

Divest & Reinvest resources from GreenFaith (<http://www.greenfaith.org/programs/divest-and-reinvest>).

The homepage for the Season of Creation, which in some denominations runs from September to mid-October each year (<http://seasonofcreation.com/>).