

Hello. My name is Mary-Louise Engels, and I want you to join me in a brief saunter down memory lane to ... Green Sanctuary. This was a church-wide program designed to help us become more actively virtuous with respect to our Seventh Principle. Anyone? “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part”.

Pioneered by the UUA, Green Sanctuary, was NOT simply an aspirational assortment of environmental principles to help Unitarians feel greener than thou. In 2001, we committed to specific changes, as individuals and as a church, with respect to energy use, purchasing, consumption and recycling. A green ethic was to be promoted in RE, worship services and social action.

To start with, we wrote our green resolutions on green paper leaves and pinned them on a paper tree at the front of the Sanctuary. Yes, we were earnest, resolved, for example, not only to reduce the amount of trash - but also to prove empirically that we had done so. Thus, the sight of a green board member solemnly weighing the church trash, week after week. For a few weeks, anyway. However, a sufficient number of our resolutions were carried out consistently over a four year period that in 2005 we were accredited by the UU Ministry for Earth as a Green Sanctuary.

One Green Sanctuary (GS)-related project for which I give thanks every time I come to church is Phoenix Garden. Formerly a desolate wasteland of weeds and asphalt, it now delights the senses with a profusion of daffodils, trees, shrubs and butterflies – and the fall vegetable harvest provides healthy

organic fare both to the single moms and others who cultivate it, and to food security organizations in our community.

While the Garden is a highly visible project, many other initiatives were unobtrusive. Take the purchasing policy, for example. Please. Many hours involving dozens of volunteers, were required to research the costs and efficacy of alternate products – like toilet papers and light bulbs, and to discuss the pros and and cons - and costs- of change with members, church staff and the Board. The case is similar with efforts to improve recycling in the kitchen, consumption patterns, and property management.

I will not try your patience – much- by describing all the GS activities over the years. We rejoiced at the excited faces of kids watching seeds they had planted turn into green shoots and then radishes. We applauded a member dressed as Kermit the Frog warbling “It isn’t easy Being Green”. Special green programs, services and workshops were offered– including the seminar on ethical investment that tackled the question “Can a green investor still make money?” The answer, “Yes, but....” We touted the tastiness of tofu, and the benefits of bike racks, partnered with potters for our “Empty Bowls” lunches to raise money for food security organizations. Our newsletter, church library, and orders of service overflowed with green tips and information. What I want to underline here is that all of these – and many more – involved the commitment and labours of many individuals over many months. That is one of the reasons that I am not mentioning specific names. To do so would be to risk missing many others who contributed generously with their time and talents.

Some of our members and friends spoke out at Sunday services about their “green moments”. One described the joys of owning a Prius; another couple recounted hosting a dinner at their lakeside home to discuss the lake’s deterioration. Over coffee they formed an environmental action group; and over time, Lake Mephemagog came again to reflect its original Indian meaning: ”Lake of Beautiful Waters”. Our resident expert on breast cancer traced the links between environmental toxins and cancer; our in-house guru on household cleansers alerted us to the hazards lurking beneath our kitchen sinks; and our green architect welcomed us to her straw bale home. We heard from the Dean of responsible laundry appliances; the pilgrim en route to vegetarianism; and the Queen of Compost, who organized a Sunday Service on ”Composting and Recycling as Spiritual Acts”.

To sample further the variety of initiatives during the GS years, I recommend that you leaf through the pages of “Achieving our Green Sanctuary Accreditation”, June 2005. It will be on display in Phoenix Hall during coffee hour. And when you hear about a church group initiative that appeals to you, go for it! Speaking personally, I learned a lot from GS, modified some of my thoughtless habits, and made good friends who are still my friends today, even though they were, and remain, greener than I.