



GREEN FIRST

Helping First Congregational move toward more sustainable living

November 9, 2010

First Congregational United Church of Christ

Volume 2, Issue 3

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FCUCC Goes Solar!?

By Stan Corwin

Have you heard that First Congregational is going solar? We (members of the Earth Team) are partnering with Sundance Power Systems and AIRE (Appalachian Institute for Renewable Energy) and with their help we are aiming to be the first church in Asheville to go solar, and thereby be a model for other churches to follow.

Our education building with its flat metal roof is ideal. We are planning on a 6-10KW system, depending on the investment money we are able to raise. This will be a simple system, consisting of an array of photovoltaic panels, an inverter to change DC energy to AC energy and a meter to tell us and Progress Energy how much *green* energy we have supplied to the grid. So, the array will not supply power to the church, rather, it will be supplying power to the grid. Every KW of solar power delivered to the grid replaces a KW of power generated by burning coal. Thus a 6 KW system will save over 10,000 pounds of CO² from going into the atmosphere each year.

You might ask, "Who is going to pay for putting this system on the roof?" Well, it won't be First Congregational, because they don't have the money. So, this is the plan—we are approaching potential investors to purchase the system. We will form a limited liability

company (LLC) to purchase the system, lease the roof from the church and continue to own the system for a nominal period of six years. Each investor is asked to purchase one or more shares in the LLC at \$5,000 or a half share at \$2500. We need to raise \$35,000 for a 6KW system or \$55,000 for 10KW. Another equally important way to invest is to make smaller contributions to the church's Solar Fund, which will be used to buy the solar system from the LLC at its depreciated value at the end of the six years.

The LLC share owners will benefit from the income paid by Progress Energy and NC Green Power for the kilowatts supplied to the grid; from the federal and state tax credits of 65% of the cost of the system; from the depreciation of the value of the system taken each year; and from the purchase of the system at its depreciated value by the church at the end of the six years. FCUCC will continue to receive the payments from Progress Energy for the energy generated after the church owns the system.

While there are some risks involved, as this is will be a first in this area, LLC share owners in high tax brackets may well not only receive their investment back, but realize a potential 10% return over the six years. Investors in lower tax brackets may well get their investment back. These potential returns are based upon First Congregational having raised enough money in the Solar Fund to buy the system from the LLC at its depreciated value; and upon our best information of the expenses for the LLC over the six year period.

Some investors will want to invest, not for the potential return, but to help North Carolina cut down on the amount of mountaintop removal coal it bums.

Note, we will be proceeding ahead to talk with potential investors even though we do not have final approval from the church yet.



Climate Change is “Critical” to Council of Churches

By Ron Martin-Adkins

On October 14, 2010, the North Carolina Council of Churches held its “Critical Issues Seminar” in Greensboro. The major theme of the day was how religious communities might respond to the climate change threat to Earth, the part of God’s creation upon which we live and depend.

Keynote speaker Rev. Canon Sally Bingham, founded Interfaith Power and Light about 10 years ago as one such response, one that gives her a lot of hope. She says that the climate crisis is primarily a religious issue, a matter of how we humans understand our place within divine creation. When churches and other faith communities move to reduce their carbon footprints and turn to alternative energy sources, it serves as an example to the wider community.

She laced her presentation with some pithy quotes, such as:

- "There has never been a solar spill."
- "We have the opportunity to redefine the human purpose: healing Earth." (rather than populating it)
- "Scientists are today's prophets."
- "Coal and oil, taken from beneath, can be seen as coming from hell. Why not take our energy from heaven, that is, from wind and sun?"
- "Faith communities have a responsibility to act on behalf of those without voice, including future generations."
- "Governments have a moral imperative to protect their people from disaster."
- "Congress commits crimes against humanity when it refuses to pass climate change legislation."

Our own Joe Hoffman and Richard Fireman (Interfaith Power and Light) co-led a workshop on transitioning congregations to sustainable practices. Richard presented an introduction to the Transition Movement that is a grassroots effort to mitigate the effects of climate change and the probable end of supplies of cheap fossil fuels. Joe talked about FCUCC's Earth Team and its work to inform the congregation and lead it into more environmentally friendly practices. The two of them also highlighted the move among churches toward renewable energy sources, such as the pending installation of solar panels at FCUCC. That will, we hope, give encouragement to other faith communities in the Asheville area to do the same.



Going Green

By Susan Waddell

Many of you probably know about the Earth Team at FCUCC, but there may be a few of you who are not sure what or who the Earth Team is. The Earth Team is a group of dedicated members of FCUCC that are working hard to help make improvements at the

Church that are Earth friendly, and help to share eco-friendly ideas and practices with the members of FCUCC.

We realize that some of you might not know about everything the Earth Team is up to, and in an effort to resolve this we will be posting a **GREEN BOARD** in the lower hallway space below the art gallery. The **GREEN BOARD** will be updated monthly. The information it will provide will include Eco Tips, news from the Earth Team regarding green improvements at FCUCC , updates on local events and meetings that one might be interested in that relate to being 'Green,' and copies of the *Green First* Newsletter.

Please note the **GREEN BOARD** was created from a recycled bulletin board, recycled material, and recycled paper, sticking with the **GREEN** theme. So, when you have a chance, be sure to come by and check out the **GREEN BOARD**, and be sure to share what you gather there with others. Reduce, Reuse, Recycle!



Congregational Green Survey: The Results are in!

By Colette Corwin

A big thanks to the 70 plus people who responded to all or some of the Earth Team's Green Survey questions, Sept. 26. The highest scores in each category tallied thus:

- Recycling—paper, plastic, glass and cans. We really do well with this; only 2 people said they never recycle. What difference does this make? According to the Buncombe County Solid Waste

newsletter, recycled-content paper creates 35% less air pollution and 70% less water pollution than paper made from new materials, plus it also saves trees. Recycling a glass bottle causes 20% less air pollution and 50% less water pollution than making a bottle from raw materials.

Once an aluminum can is recycled, it can be part of a new can within six weeks! And we also are helping the NC economy since over 500 NC companies use our recyclables to make new products and none of the recyclables travel over five hours to a manufacturing plant keeping the cost of recycling down.

- Food - Using a reusable water bottle vs. buying bottled water got the highest score in this category. How big of an environmental impact does this make? If you got all the water you needed each day, about 64 oz., from bottled water, you would be using and discarding four bottles a day or 1,460 bottles a year. If on occasion you do need to buy bottled water, be sure to recycle the bottle. Believe it or not, in NC there is a law against discarding water bottles in the trash.
- Buying local food when available scored second highest. Fortunately, we are blessed with tail gate markets and some local produce in chain grocery stores. We thus offset the average 1,500 miles most food products travel to market. And kudos to the 43 people who are able to grow some of their own food - can't get more local than that.
- Transportation/driving less category - 3/4 of us are into combining errands most of the time and half of us carpool sometimes, plus over half do some biking and walking. Using public transportation is a stretch for most of us, with 8 respondees using it all or sometimes.
- Home energy use - The low hanging fruit of turning off lights was the winner, with replacing light bulbs with CFL's second. Again this makes a difference. Did you know that it takes 162 pounds of coal to light a house with incandescent light bulbs for a month? And yes, most of NC electricity is generated by coal-powered plants, fueled in large part by mountain top removal coal. Incidentally, if you are wondering where to recycle CFLs, there's a box labeled "CFLs" in the lower church hallway where the bulletin boards are, along with a box for recycling batteries.
- We also did well on using less AC and lowering heat settings in winter. If you would like to compare your daily electricity use with that of the average US household, it's 24 kwh / 24 hrs.
- Ranking FCUCC's greenness: 33 Good; 25 Fair
 Recurring suggestions for improving greenness were: not using disposables at pot lucks & etc., less paper use & more electronic communications/meetings, organizing car pools, solar panels, turning lights off and less lighting in the sanctuary on sunny days, more education, purchasing recycled supplies, more

insulation, and a wish list for low flush toilets/flushless urinals, bathroom light sensors, rain barrels, energy-efficient dish washer.

- Does our faith experience make a difference in our concern for the environment? Some quotes: completely; positively; deeply; profoundly; greatly; very much so; the two are fully connected; they influence each other; all one experience; it's a justice issue; they are inseparable; life long church/life long farmer; huge impact; it is fundamental to it; my spirituality is directly connected to the Earth and environment; they go hand in hand; as a faith community and as individuals we are called to be good stewards of the Earth; I see it as a covenant between us and the source of all that is holy.

The Earth Team appreciates your overwhelming support for the Green First Newsletter. We thank those who volunteered to write articles for it and who expressed interest in joining the Earth Team. Together we all can continue to make a difference.

A copy of the full survey results will be posted on the new green Earth Team bulletin board in the lower hallway.

Many of the Earth's habitats, animals, plants, insects and even micro-organisms that we know to be rare may not be known at all by future generations. We have the capability and the responsibility to act; we must do so before it is too late. - Dalai Lama



'Tis the Season for the Alternative Gift Market

By Meg Word-Sims and Virginia Himmelheber

There is new energy and this years Alternative Gift Market is being transformed more into a festival.

The "market" will be all over the church on Saturday November 20th from 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, and Sunday after church. We're inviting other UCC-affiliated churches from our region, to participate, David Wilcox, a talented local singer-songwriter, and peace activist with the NC council of Churches, will be a featured speaker on Saturday afternoon, and we hope you will participate too.

The market focuses on alternative gifting for Christmas and aims to promote green, fairly-traded goods, and new arts and crafts to sell, as well as gifting to non-profit agencies. We're asking artists to tithe 10% of their proceeds to outreach (to be decided).

There will be an FCUCC All-Church Table and 100% of the proceeds from this will go to *Neighbors in Need*. We are looking for handcrafted/homemade items; it's a good chance to display your talents! Handmade scarves, jewelry, aprons, jelly, bread, cakes--you name it, we'd love to have it. We are hoping that each member of the congregation can contribute one or two items. We are looking for items in the \$25 or under price range.



The Green Couch Potato

A Column by Debi Brewer

Is it just me, or is the world moving in circles? Are you like me, finding that the new fangled ways of doing things might not be the best or the most responsible? Case in point: my bath soap.

One of the things I have learned from my green journey is it's not only what I'm buying that's important, it's also how it's packaged. Do you remember back in the 1990s when so many US military bases were being closed? The Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRACC) went through the world like a tornado and we in the military learned something about the way we purchased weapons systems. We bought them to use—we didn't buy them to throw away. And when it came time to dismantle some of them, it was a mess.

My point? I changed and wasn't thinking only about *using* my soap, I was thinking about how I was going to throw it away. At first, I merely recycled the bottles. Hooray for me! That helps (see Colette's article above.) Then I wanted to do more so now I buy bar soap wrapped in very little plastic (good) or paper (best).

But why stop with the soap. What about those colorful net scrubby things? What do *you* call them? Everybody has their own terminology, I'm certain. Anyway, they are just a chunk of plastic with thousands of holes. They come unraveled and go into the waste

bin. When they first came out, I thought they were so cool! They felt so good against my skin. I felt so pampered with my liquid soap and my purple net-ball loofa thingy. Well, thinking all of this through, I have gone back to good, old-fashioned washcloths. Hang them up to dry. Toss them in the wash. Use them over and over again. I've come full circle, back to my childhood. Taking a bath with a washcloth and a bar of soap. And knowing I'm making a choice for Earth gives me a better feeling than that ol' chunk of plastic ever did.

What choices can you make?

Green First is a periodic e-newsletter provided as a service of the Earth Team to members and friends of First Congregational United Church of Christ, Asheville, North Carolina.

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