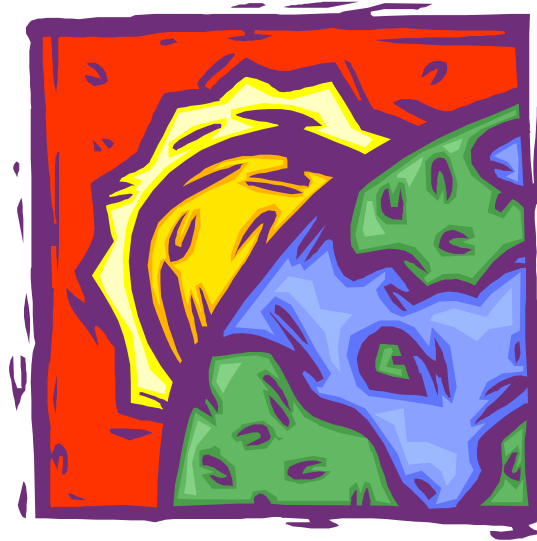


# The Green Sanctuary Workshop



## A Guide for Leading an Environmental Workshop with Unitarian Universalist Youth Groups

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## **I. Introduction**

Promise the Children is a Massachusetts-based Unitarian Universalist organization. Promise the Children works with Unitarian Universalist adults around the country, giving them resources to advocate effectively for children and youth. In addition, we offer workshops each year for Unitarian Universalist youth in Massachusetts. The goal of our youth programs is to educate youth about social issues and strengthen their ability to make change in their congregations and in their communities.

During the 2006-2007 congregational year, Promise the Children developed and facilitated the Green Web Workshop (GWW). One of our main goals for the Green Web Workshop is to give youth the skills to advocate for change. In order to be change-makers, youth need to be able to analyze a problem, come up with solutions as a team, and advocate for these solutions. The Green Web Workshop teaches these skills, which youth can use in many arenas, including congregational life, community organizing, and political advocacy.

One reason that we were welcomed into congregations is that we choose a workshop issue that was timely and compelling: environmental protection. Promise the Children did not pull this issue out of thin air. It developed out of conversations between Promise the Children's president and several religious educators who served on the board of Promise the Children. Promise the Children also consulted with a staff member of the Mass Bay District. Environmental workshops for youth were clearly needed, and were not being provided by another Unitarian Universalist organization in Massachusetts.

We recruited an intergenerational team of facilitators, including a high school youth (Leila Smith), a college student (Llora McGrath), a young adult (Shelby Meyerhoff), and an adult (Becky Richardson). Each member of the team had experience working with Unitarian Universalist youth groups.

This team worked together to develop and lead the workshop for youth groups at Unitarian Universalist congregations in Massachusetts. Over the course of the year, Promise the Children led the Green Web Workshop at congregations in Boston, Groton, Milton, North Andover, Watertown and Winchester. We led the workshop with both middle-school and high-school groups.

Each time we led the Green Web Workshop, we learned from our own reactions and from the feedback given by participants. We experimented with different activities and formats throughout the year. Our staff group, and the workshop itself, benefited greatly from the process of learning, experimenting and evaluating. We not only grew in our ability to lead this specific workshop effectively, but also in our broader understanding of how to lead workshops with youth.

This handbook gives suggestions for how you can lead the Green Web Workshop with the youth group in your congregation without Promise facilitating. We also included our

more generally-applicable insights about working with youth groups. We hope this will be helpful to you in your work with Unitarian Universalist youth. We welcome your feedback on this guide—if, after reading, you have reactions, questions or suggestions, please e-mail Rebekah Richardson, [rkr@promisethechildrenuu.org](mailto:rkr@promisethechildrenuu.org)

## II. Preparation

### Step 1. Important information about the workshop:

- The length of the Green Web Workshop is 90 minutes
- The names of **our** facilitators are Meryl Baier and Becky Richardson
- The target age for the workshop is grades 7-12
- Contact information: [meryl@promisethechildrenuu.org](mailto:meryl@promisethechildrenuu.org)



### Step 2: Collecting Materials

In order to save natural resources and money, you should ask people in the congregation to donate the materials needed for the workshop. The main activity requires the use of magazines, particularly magazines about the natural world (such as Science, National Geographic, etc.) See the complete list on page 5.



## III. Notes for Facilitators

The goal of this workshop is to help *youth* develop the skills to make change. Perhaps the most critical skill is being able to speak clearly about the threats to the environment, and the possible solutions. As a facilitator, your job includes creating a space where youth are supported in speaking to the group.



There may be programs that very effectively encourage intergenerational participation. However, in our experience with this workshop, adults sometimes hindered the participation of youth. Guest adults (including parents, volunteers, etc.) sometimes overwhelm the youth, by talking excessively. Unitarian Universalist adults are passionate about global warming, and therefore will want to participate fully in the workshop. However, when adults take the lead in these settings, youth may be hesitant about participating.

If you must have adults present, we found that the most productive approach was to separate the adults from the youth, and lead a separate discussion or workshop with adults. This was possible because we had several staff people. If you have fewer staff people, separate the adults out whenever possible. (For example, during the congregational role play, you might ask adults to all be in the same small group, and to only send one representative to the governing board meeting.)

It may also help to address the issue directly at the beginning, with a statement that this is a workshop designed to help youth articulate solutions to global warming. Emphasize that the role of adults is to listen to these solutions, and occasionally ask questions.

## **IV. Leading the Workshop**

### **Step 1. Materials**

Bring with you to the workshop all of the following materials:

- This guide
- Nametag stickers
- Colorful markers (that can be used on nametags, construction paper, and pad of paper)
- A large pad of paper, or a portable board on which you can write
- Chalice candle
- Matches or lighter
- Reading for chalice lighting
- Informational handouts about global warming
- Magazines (from a variety of genres, including some magazines about the natural world)
- Construction paper
- Markers
- Glue sticks
- Scissors

### **Step 2: Nametags**

Ask students to make nametags as they are entering the space where you will be leading the workshop. Put a small twist on nametags by asking youth to draw their favorite outdoor activity. Having everyone wear nametags helped us to identify youth and call them by their names during the workshop.

### **Step 3: Post an Agenda**

On a blackboard, or on a large piece of paper, list each step of the workshop. For example:

Introductions  
Check-In  
Ice Breaker... (etc.)



### **Step 4: Introductions**

Set up the group in a circle. If you have several facilitators, scatter yourselves around the circle, so that you can interact more easily with the group. (When all the facilitators stand at the front, it tends to create a classroom feel, which is not ideal).

Introduce yourself at the start of the workshop. Give your name and say a few sentences about your organization (if you are an outside facilitator) and about the workshop. At this time, one facilitator should also run through the agenda. It is not necessary to explain every item in detail. Instead, you might say “I know I like to have an idea of what is coming up when I am participating in a workshop, so I posted our agenda here. We’re starting with introductions, and in a minute we are going to check-in. After that, we’ll do an icebreaker...” (etc.)

### **Step 5: Check-In**

Ask each student and facilitator to share their name and the answer to a particular question. Generally we asked students to share something related to the topic of the workshop (i.e. the environment). For example, if you want to connect check-in with the nametags, the question could be “what is your favorite outdoor activity?”



### **Step 6: Chalice Lighting**

You may also want to do a chalice-lighting at this time. You can bring a chalice lighting in advance, and ask one youth to read the text, while the other lights the chalice.

The chalice lighting is important for several reasons. First, it gives participants a moment to center themselves. Second, a reading about nature can help participants focus on the topic at hand, and their own feelings about the environment. Third, it emphasizes that this workshop is taking place in a religious context; it is about our beliefs and commitments, as well as the skills needed to act on these beliefs.

Here are some resources for chalice lightings:

<http://uuministryforearth.org/earthsunday/OpeningWordsChaliceLighting.pdf>  
UU Ministry for the Earth.

<http://www.cuups.org/content/liturgy/readings.html>  
Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans

<http://www.uua.org/spirituallife/worshipweb/openings/categories/4097.shtml>  
UUA’s Worship Web

### **Step 7: Ice-breaker**

An icebreaker is any activity that gets participants working together in a fun, non-threatening way. Icebreakers are especially important with groups in which the youth do

not know each well (such as when youth groups from different congregations meet together), or when a single youth group does not meet frequently.

One icebreaker to use is titled, “The Wind Blows.” It is similar to musical chairs. At the start of the game, participants should be seated in chairs, in a circle, except for one participant who is standing in the center of the circle. There should only be enough chairs in the circle for everyone who is seated. The participant in the center of the circle completes the phrase “The wind blows for everyone who \_\_\_\_\_.” The speaker should fill in this phrase with something that is true for them.

For example, if the person in the center of the circle wears glasses, she might say “the wind blows for everyone who wears glasses.” At this point, everyone seated in the circle who wears glasses gets out of their chairs, and, along with the person who made the statement, rushes to fill another open seat. This open seat cannot be one right next to their former seat. Since there is one less chair than the number of people playing, someone will be left without a chair. This person then becomes the person who stands in the center of the circle.<sup>1</sup>

Deep Fun (<http://www25.uua.org/YRUU/resources/online/deepfun.html>) also lists a number of ice breakers that can be used with UU youth.

### **Step 8: Discussion of Global Warming**

Take 5-7 minutes to explain global warming and some possible solutions.

The following are great resources on global warming and can be printed and distributed to youth:

<http://uuministryforearth.org/globalwarming/PortlandGWQA.pdf>

(Explains what global warming is.)

<http://www.climatecrisis.net/takeaction/whatyoucando/>

(Explains what individuals can do to make a difference)

Rather than simply lecturing on global warming, find opportunities to ask students questions as you review material. Here are some sample questions that might stimulate discussion...

For **middle school** youth...

After you have explained global warming... “How many of you have studied global warming in school or in church? Have you learned anything about global warming that surprised you?”

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<sup>1</sup> A detailed description of the Wind Blows, along with suggested variations, can be found in: Stanley Pollock, with Mary Fusoni, *Moving Beyond Icebreakers: An Innovative Approach to Group Facilitation, Learning and Action* (Boston, MA: The Center for Teen Empowerment, Inc., 2005), pgs. 377-380.

After you have handed a list of actions they can take to prevent global warming... “Do you see any actions on this list that you have taken?”

As you are discussing specific actions you can take... “Do you have a local farmer’s market in this community?” “How do you get to school in the morning?”

For **high school** youth...

After you have explained global warming... “Is there anything else you’ve learned about global warming that you think is important for people to know?”

After you have handed out a list of actions they can take... “How many of you have worked on programs that reduce global warming?” or “Have you done any work in your school or church to reduce global warming?”

“What do you think are the biggest producers of CO<sub>2</sub> in your community?”

Because you are going to do several more activities with them that explore solutions to global warming, you don’t want to belabor this discussion.

When information is not presented up front, youth often commented afterwards that more background would have been helpful. If global warming is over-discussed at the beginning of the workshop, later activities felt repetitive. Try to strike a balance by having a short discussion with handouts, and a few follow-up questions.

### **Step 9: Collage**



This is the highlight of the workshop for most youth. Explain to the participants that each person is invited to make a collage. One side of paper should show actions and products that are good for the environment (and reduce global warming), and the other side should show actions and products that are bad for the environment (and increase global warming). Or if they prefer, they can choose to focus on only things that are good, or only things that are bad.

Try to bring a variety of magazines, so that they will have different kinds of images to choose from. These should include magazines about nature in order for them to be able to find things that are good for environment. Many of the images in celebrity magazines and even mainstream news magazines depict things that are bad for the environment (cars, airplanes, etc.).

Staff should participate in this activity as well!

After 15-20 minutes of collage making, ask youth to go around the circle and point out one action or product they showed in their collage.

## **Step 10: Taking Action**

The purpose of this step is to train youth to make change in their community on the issue of global warming.

### **Congregational Role Play:**

In this activity, make up a fictional Unitarian Universalist congregation that was trying to decide whether or not to adopt measures to increase the environmental-friendliness of the congregation. First we listed the measures the congregation was considering adopting.

For example, energy efficiency measures may include:

- using more energy-efficient light bulbs
- installing appliances in the kitchen
- turning the building heating down
- installing solar panels
- teaching classes for adults in reducing energy consumption
- leading a worship service about the environment

For a sense of the different areas of church life that could be impacted by environmental measures, see the Green Sanctuary program's handout on an environmental audit of a congregation: <http://uuministryforearth.org/files/GreenSanctuarySummary.pdf>

Explain a little bit about the congregation. For example, "This is a small congregation. Money is tight. Many members of the congregation are involved in different social justice projects."

For the role play, youth should be divided into different subcommittees of the church, including finance, social action, worship, religious education, and the governing board. Describe the concerns of these committees based on our own experiences in our congregations.

In coming up with the descriptions of the committees, don't romanticize congregational life. All congregations include people with different and sometimes competing visions. One purpose of this exercise is to help youth navigate tension between groups and come up with solutions that address multiple concerns.

Instead of telling youth what each committee should think, try to tell them what each committee is responsible for. This gives youth space to consider the impact of an environmental preservation program for themselves. Instead of saying "the finance committee opposes this proposal," try saying, "the finance committee is responsible for making sure the church does not spend more money than it can afford." This technique leads to some interesting discussion among finance committee members as to whether or not environmental preservation would save money or cost money.

Below are some sample committee descriptions. Please feel free to adapt them based on your own congregation.

**The finance committee** is responsible for making sure the church comes up with a budget that meets its needs, while not spending more than it can afford. The finance committee has to evaluate requests from many different groups in the church.

**The social action committee** engages the congregation in effective, justice-making programs. Social action committee members themselves may have divergent interests (i.e. some people might want the church to take on a welcoming congregation program or to lobby on the war in Iraq).

**The worship committee** works with the ministerial staff to create worship. The worship committee and the ministerial staff may have to fit a number of different holidays and special events into the worship calendar.

**The religious education committee** works with the religious education staff, to run programming for children, youth, and in some cases adults. This programming is meant to deepen participants' understanding of Unitarian Universalism, support participants in their spiritual growth, and build relationships among participants.

**The governing board** of the congregation is responsible for setting the overall policies and direction for the congregation. Often the governing board is elected. The governing board should be concerned with what is in the best interest of the entire congregation, and should take multiple considerations into account.

Tell the participants that there will be a meeting of the governing board, where members of the different committees will be invited to attend. At this meeting, the governing board will hear ideas from the different committee representatives, and then recommend follow-up steps for the congregation.

The youth should spend about 10 minutes preparing for the meeting. During this time, facilitators should circulate amongst the groups. Ask the groups questions to help them prepare for the meeting.

Finally, regroup for the meeting with the governing board. Choose strong youth leaders to represent the governing board so that they can facilitate the meeting themselves. Facilitators can participate in the role play, pretending to be various members of the congregation. This gives opportunities to stimulate the conversation if things are lagging, or to ask challenging questions. It also set a tone of participation.

### **Step 11: Evaluation**

Evaluation is an important step in helping to prepare for the next workshop. We help your participants understand why their feedback is important. Ask questions such as, "The next time we do this workshop with Unitarian Universalist youth, what should we keep

the same? What should we do differently?" This makes the participants opinion valuable in the curriculum decision making process.

### **Step 12: Closing**

Thank them for their participation and give positive feedback about the workshop as appropriate (i.e. "We really appreciate you putting so many energy into the collages. We came up with a great list together of actions that are good and bad for the environment."), and extinguish the chalice.

### **V. Your feedback**

This guide to the Green Sanctuary Workshop is a work in progress. Thanks to the ease of publishing and distributing materials on the internet, we have the capacity to make updates and changes over time. Please contact us to share your questions and suggestions about this guide.

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