

St. Paul's Church, Milwaukee: A Greener Faith, A More Vital Parish

by The Rev. Miranda Hassett, for the Commission on Mission & Development

St. Paul's applied for a 2013 Meachem Fund Congregational Development grant to help pay the fees associated with undertaking the GreenFaith certification program (greenfaith.org). This is an exciting undertaking that brings together stewardship of resources, stewardship of creation, Christian formation and missional engagement with the surrounding community. John Hainze of St. Paul's answered some questions about the program. St. Paul's would be happy to share their experiences, and better yet, their journey with other parishes! Check the GreenFaith website to learn more; they have many helpful resources, even if starting the certification process isn't the right step for your parish right now.

How did St Paul's decide to explore GreenFaith?

GreenFaith was involved with the Interfaith Earth Network (part of Milwaukee Interfaith Conference) in developing a conference last fall called Ground for Hope - Wisconsin. GreenFaith has sponsored a number of these conferences around the US. This is how we at St. Paul's came to be aware of GreenFaith. In considering how we might develop a focus on the environment and sustainability at St Paul's, the GreenFaith certification process seems to provide a structured approach with ample support. And, it provides a very visible process that the parish can rally around.

How does the GreenFaith process fit into the parish's sense of mission and identity? Why does this matter to the people of St. Paul's?

This is a new initiative for St Paul's but there was already a latent interest in the environment, and the parish had taken steps with lighting and low flush toilets, for example, to reduce our environmental footprint. Additionally, the Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefferts Schori, spoke on the environment at St Paul's in January. I think that was a significant point of inspiration for us. The response to the GreenFaith certification idea has been very positive. We now have a "Green Team" with 13 volunteer members. The initiative was enthusiastically supported by our vestry. St Paul's has a unique identity as an urban church that resides only a few blocks from Lake Michigan. So there is a strong interest in preserving the natural environment as well as in eco-justice issues that might be encountered in an urban setting. The GreenFaith certification process addresses both.

What do you hope to get out of this process?

We hope to infuse all aspects of our parish life with a focus on the environment and sustainability. One of the advantages of working with Greenfaith is they help the congregation focus on a list of activities that are designed to both raise parish awareness and to result in meaningful contributions to improving our environment. Over the two year certification process, parish members will engage in education related to our Christian responsibilities for the environment, incorporate the environment in our worship service, make changes to our physical plant that will reduce our environmental footprint, make changes in our personal lives that reduce our environmental footprint and engage in community activities that lead to greater sustainability and protection of our environment. I think it will be an initiative that encourages us to draw together and grow as a parish. We're also hopeful that our commitment will be visible beyond the church and will involve neighbors (other downtown churches, residents, etc.) in our activities. The Interfaith Earth Network is working with us on this project and will be providing what we learn in the process to other places of worship in the Milwaukee area.

