

# Application for Green Sanctuary Candidacy

## Congregation Information

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|---------------------------------|---|
| Congregation Name               | Unitarian Universalist Congregation   |
| Address                         | 1301 Gladewood Drive, Blacksburg, VA 224060 (Mail: P.O. Box 10116, Blacksburg, VA 24062-0116) |
| Web site                        | <a href="http://www.uucnrv.org">http://www.uucnrv.org</a>                                     |
| Green Sanctuary contact         | Dick Bauman   |
| Address                         | 1208 Cedar Orchard Dr. E., Blacksburg, VA 24060   |
| Phone                           | (540) 552-8829  |
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| Minister or Congregation Leader | Rev. Christine Brownlie   |
|                                 |   |

## Congregation Profile

We are located in a residential section of a university town in southwest Virginia. Virginia Tech has about 24,000 students and is centrally situated in the community, with a number of faculty and staff members among the congregation as well as a few students. Our membership most recently was reported as 163, and our average attendance is 110 adults, and 50 children for RE and child care. Many of our congregation live in Blacksburg, but some travel considerable distance from other towns to attend. We have a wide range of age groups, with many young families, middle age couples and retired seniors, singles and couples. We became a Welcoming Congregation in 2004, and have GLBT members and friends.

Our salaried staff includes our full-time minister, the Rev. Christine; a full-time Administrator, Lisa Evanylo; our Director of Religious Education, Kristine Reid; a Music Director, Goldie Terrell; a pianist, Jared Gibbs; a bookkeeper and a sexton. We also have a volunteer treasurer. In governance, our Executive Board comprises our President, Past President, President Elect, Treasurer, and four Members-at-Large, with our Minister, DRE and Administrator as ex-officio members. Of course, there are numerous support committees and action groups.

We were founded in 1956 with seven families, and chartered October 8, 1956. Meetings were held in various locations on the VT campus until growth at the university brought young, liberal faculty which in turn brought growth to the Fellowship and enabled it to purchase property and build a meeting house completed in December, 1967. Various part-time ministers served the Fellowship,

and further growth led to purchase of adjoining property and construction of a larger building, completed in May, 1992. Half-time ministers served until our first full-time minister, Rev. Brownlie, was called in August, 1999. Effective July 1, 2003, the congregation's name was changed from the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the New River Valley to the Unitarian Universalist Congregation, and we adopted the following Mission Statement: "We are a caring and diverse community bringing spirit, love, justice, learning and reason to our congregation and to the larger world."

Following a very successful capital campaign, a new sanctuary and RE rooms were added to the building, enabling us to move from two Sunday services to one, and to convert our former sanctuary to a fellowship hall. The first service in the new sanctuary was a Water Service on August 31, 2008, and the addition was dedicated September 7, 2008.

A survey of the congregation in January, 2007 found that the two issues of highest concern for the Congregation were the environment and peacemaking, in that order. Therefore we embarked on our Green Sanctuary Program and established a Peacemaking Committee under the auspices of the Social Action Committee.

A general survey of the congregation was conducted in February and March of 2009, with one of the questions "Should we become a Green Sanctuary?" In response, 28.8% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, and 13.5% disagreed, with the remainder undecided. This survey had a 74% completion rate, and was a valid representation of the congregation.

## **Green Sanctuary Committee**

The Committee has been composed of a core planning group of three members: Bobbie Littlefield and Dick Bauman, Co-Chairs of the Social Action Committee, and Barb Boyd, member of the SAC. Bobbie is a former president of the congregation, and Dick has served on the Executive Board. We have three members working on the Low Carbon Diet phase of the program: Bob Stimson, Shelley Fortier and Suzanne Glasson; and two working on Earth Justice: Joe Powers and Darla Bray (President of the UUC). We have had the full support of our minister and our DRE. In addition we have a volunteer list of 44 members and friends who have indicated their interest in helping with the program. The Charter for the committee was approved by the Executive Board on February 14, 2008. A copy of the Charter is attached to the e-mail transmitting this application.

Our environmental interests include making our building, grounds and church housekeeping practices as earth-friendly as possible; conforming our personal households to environmentally healthy standards, and working in and with our community and globally to promote a safe and green environment for the interdependent web of life.

## **Environmental Assessment**

Please see the attachment to the e-mail forwarding this Application for our Environmental Assessment. I was told this would be acceptable.

## Action Plan

As a preface, we have been working on many of these projects following our Charter and prior to the submission of this application. Therefore, many have been already completed.

### *Worship and Celebration Projects (2 required)*

**Project Title:** “Ethical Eating“ Sermon Series, and sermon on food and world well-being. **Project Description:** (links are included for sermon URLs):

- Sermon - October 5, 2008; “[Ethical Eating](#)“: Sermon content includes “Environmental concerns and concerns about animal rights. What moral guidelines, if any, should govern food production?” Our goal is to “Support sustainable agriculture and farmers’ markets” and “Encourage organic community gardening”, as well as to “Become an advocate for social and economic justice.”
- Sermon - October 12, 2008; “[Food, Feast and Famine](#)”: Excerpts: “Like you, I worry about the issues of sustainability, the treatment of farm workers, and the living conditions of animals that supply the eggs, milk and meat that I consume. I’m uneasy about pesticides, hormones and other additives.” The sermon quotes Michael Pollan’s book “The Omnivore’s Dilemma”, in which he “encourages us to seek full consciousness of what it took to create this meal.”
- Sermon - April 6, 2008: “[Do We Care Enough to Share?](#)”: Excerpts: “I know that many of us are carefully examining the way we live and making changes that will reduce our ‘footprint’ on the planet.” It addresses the dilemma of population control while feeding and healing the hungry and sick. “We must act boldly with commitment and determination, caring and sharing so that the web of life can continue and even heal.”

**Timeline for Completion:** Completed on dates shown.

**Lead:** Rev. Christine Brownlie

**Project Title:** Sermon “[UUC Justice Sunday: The Right to Safe Water](#)”

Sermon Content: “How many times a day do you turn on the tap in a sink and have instant access to safe clean water?...Not everyone enjoys what we take for granted. How can we address the justice issue of safe water and sanitation as a basic human right?”

**Timeline for Completion:** Completed March 15, 2009

**Lead:** Rev. Christine Brownlie

**Project Title:** Sermon “[When is Enough Enough?](#)”

Sermon Content: Reference to the Hebrew spiritual practice of Dayenu; it is enough, we were given what we needed. Consumerism produces stress in our lives, the “...over-heated and relentless attempt to create an artificial ‘need’ and that persistent itch of want that will never be quieted. ...For the sake of those who live in grave poverty and for the health of the planet, we need to get off the crazy carousel of consumption that has been promoted so heavily for the past few decades.”

**Timeline for Completion:** Completed April 5, 2009

**Lead:** Rev. Christine Brownlie

**Project Title:** Winter Solstice Celebration

**Project Description:**

**Timeline for Completion:** Completed December 21, 2008

**Lead:** WomenSpirit group of UUC.

Other WomenSpirit Programs: Ostara Ritual celebrating the Spring Equinox on March 20, 2009, and a celebration of the full Windy Moon on April 10, 2009.

***Religious Education Projects (2 required, 1 for children and 1 for adults)***

**Project Title:** Preservation of Open Land

**Project Description:** The RE classes were addressed by Beth Obenshain, Executive Director of the New River Land Trust (founded by our UUC member Leslie Howard), teaching about the importance and value of preserving open natural space. The mission of the NRLT is “conserving farmland, forest, open spaces and historic places in Virginia’s New River region“, and has protected “over 31,000 acres in that region through donation of conservation easements

**Timeline for Completion:** Completed

**Lead:** Kristine Reid, DRE

**Project Title:** Tree Planting

**Project Description:** Our Middle High student group participated in a community project, “Trees for Life”, planting 33 trees and committing to caring for those trees for a two-year period. The trees were planted in commemoration of the 33 students and faculty of Virginia Tech who were killed on campus on April 16, 2008 by a student.

**Timeline for Completion:** Completed

**Lead:** Holly Lesko, adult leader of Middle High group.

**Project Title: Adult Education, “Sunday Circle” (Four Projects)**

**Project Description:** This group meets the second and fourth Sundays each month (except June, July and August) before the service, and some subjects of discussion include those of environmental concern, as follow.

- Book discussion of “Six Degrees: Our Future on a Hotter Planet”, author Mark Lynas, led by Professor Emeritus John Cairns, and completed March 8, 2009. This subject covered the “profound biological and ecological changes we face as our planet warms.”
- Discussion of the “Low Carbon Diet” program currently underway in our congregation, led by Shelley Fortier and other Green Team members, completed March 22, 2009.
- Discussion of the book, “Bringing Nature Home”, led by Gloria Heath, regarding native and alien plants, and their effect on the environment, completed May 27, 2009.
- Presentation by UU minister the Rev. Greta Browne, who is traveling U.S. Route 11 from New Orleans to the Canadian border to promote awareness of global warming, “For all the grandchildren,” completed May 31, 2009.

- “King Coal”: Presentation and discussion led by Rev. Baldwin Lloyd, retired Episcopalian minister, who has worked with and advocated for coal miners and their communities for 40 years. Rev. Lloyd discussed the devastation caused by mountain-top coal mining, describing coal mining as “the last unchallenged stronghold of colonialism.” Completed September 20, 2009.
- Alternative Energy: Energy sources other than fossil fuels, to be led by Dean Mook, retired professor of engineering at Virginia Tech. Scheduled for October 4, 2009.

**Timeline for Completion:** As shown.

**Lead:** As shown.

*Environmental Justice (2 required, 1 long-term that **actively** promotes justice for those affected by environmental injustices and creates relationships)*

**Project Title:** Oppose Mountain-Top Removal for Coal Mining

**Project Description:** Our neighbor state, West Virginia, has seen many of its mountain ridges decimated by mining operations, with the residue dumped into valleys and streams. This has deeply affected the residents of the “hollows”. According to Robert Kennedy, Jr. in a Washington Post article printed in the Roanoke Times 7/12/09, “Mining syndicates are detonating 2500 tons of explosives every day...to blow up Appalachia’s mountains and extract sub-surface coal seams. They have demolished 500 mountains – encompassing about a million acres – buried hundreds of valley streams under tons of rubble, poisoned and uprooted countless communities, and caused widespread contamination to the region’s air and water.” The people in these communities are often poor and powerless to stop the destruction of their environment.

Various organizations are opposing these operations, including the Natural Resources Defense Council. Their website, [www.NoMoreMountaintopRemoval.org](http://www.NoMoreMountaintopRemoval.org), includes action suggestions which we would implement, including pressure on Congress and the Obama administration to enact legislation and regulation to prohibit this destructive practice. It will require a concerted and ongoing effort to counteract the power of the mining operators and their supporters.

The local New River Valley Group of the Sierra Club is part of the effort to prevent further damage to the Appalachian Mountains, in conjunction with other groups such as Mountain Justice. Our intent would be to work with these groups and the NRDC.

**Timeline for Completion:** Ongoing.

**Lead:** Dick Bauman

**Project Title:** Prevention of Coal Fly Ash Dumping in Landfills

**Project Description:** Our neighboring county, Giles County, has recently voted to allow the dumping of coal ash in landfill adjoining the New River. This presents a risk of coal fly ash leaching into the river, which is the source of the water supply for localities downstream. Fly ash is a byproduct of coal-fired power plants and can contain toxins such as arsenic, lead and mercury.

Cumberland Park in Giles County would fill “about seven acres of New River flood plain with 254,000 cubic yards of coal ash” according to an article in the Roanoke Times, January 27, 2009.

Legislation introduced in the Virginia Senate and House of Delegates in 2008 to limit fly ash use failed, and further legislation proposed this year.

We could coordinate with a group, Concerned Citizens of Giles, in Giles County opposing fly ash dumping and also pressure our representatives in the state legislation to enact a strong law prohibiting fly ash fill in flood plains, in cooperation with the Sierra Club and its New River Group.

**Timeline for Completion:** Ongoing

**Lead:** Dick Bauman

*Sustainable Living (4 required, 1 that addresses energy conservation)*

**Project Title:** “Low Carbon Diet” Program

**Project Description:** Following the program outlined in the handbook, members of our Green Team are presenting ideas for reduction of our household carbon output through reduced energy consumption (lowering thermostats, installing programmable thermostats, using cold water for clothes washing, unplugging electronic appliances that drain energy even when turned off, etc.). Information is communicated to the congregation by e-mail and newsletter. An artificial tree is located in the rear entry on which congregants can attach leaves showing their carbon-reduction commitments and results

**Timeline for Completion:** The initial program culminated on Earth Day, 2009, but our carbon “diet” efforts will continue. Members and friends have pledged to save 28,185 pounds of carbon through vegetarianism, re-cycling, replacement of a heating and cooling system and unplugging LED lighted electronics. (This total is underestimated because re-cycling is common practice throughout the congregation.)

**Lead:** Members of the Green Team: Shelley Fortier, Bob Stimson and Suzanne Glasson.

**Project Title:** Electronic Newsletter

**Project Description:** We produced a monthly newsletter with 280 copies mailed to members and friends of the congregation. The newsletter averages about 13 pages, using 6.5 double sheets of 11” by 17” paper. We have replaced the paper newsletter with an electronic newsletter sent by e-mail. For those who do not have computer access, the paper issue will continue to be mailed. We have surveyed the mailing list, and 75 recipients have requested continuation of paper copies. This represents a saving of 2665 11”x 17” sheets of paper monthly.

**Timeline for Completion:** April, 2009 (completed).

**Lead:** Lisa Evanylo, Administrator

**Project Title:** Environmental Concert

**Project Description:** We hosted in our sanctuary a concert by “Walkin’ Jim Stoltz”, singer-songwriter and environmentalist, which was open to the community. Jim walks the wild country of our nation, and writes and sings about the beauty he sees in the plains, forests and mountains, and his vision of preserving the wild lands.

**Timeline for Completion:** The concert was held March 15, 2009 (completed).

**Lead:** Rev. Christine Brownlie

**Project Title:** ReHabitat: Restoration of Housing for Low-Income Families

**Project Description:** Several members of our congregation have been working with the Blacksburg Presbyterian Church to renovate and restore trailers and other homes for low-income residents of our community to make them more habitable and comfortable. This involves conservation and preservation of existing housing.

**Timeline for Completion:** Ongoing.

**Lead:** Shelley Fortier

*Additional (2 required, these can relate to the program elements of your choice)*

**Project Title: “Grow an Extra Row”** **Project Description:** Members and friends of the congregation are encouraged to plant an extra row in their vegetable gardens this summer to donate the produce to the Blacksburg Interfaith Food Pantry, which serves disadvantaged members of the community

**Timeline for Completion:** Fall, 2009

**Lead:** Linda Pfeiffer

**Project Title:** Stream Restoration of Stroubles Creek, Blacksburg, VA

**Project Description:** Grading of eroding stream banks to a stable angle and planting a riparian (streamside vegetation) buffer, using erosion control fabric and coir fiber logs. Project developed by UU Assistant Professor Tess Wynn of the Virginia Tech Biological Systems Engineering Dep’t.

**Timeline for Completion:** November, 2009.

**Lead:** Dick Bauman

## **Communications Plan**

Our web site, <http://www.uucnr.org>, includes a section under “Congregation News” describing the Green Sanctuary Program, covering an overview, a description of our goals, the process of the program, and our communication conduits. The web site also has links to other sites with information on environmental issues. In addition, we frequently report in our monthly newsletter on program events and progress, and use the listserv for the congregation and another listserv specifically dedicated to those who have stated their interest in the environment to provide information, reports and request participation. The “Low Carbon Diet” team made announcements during Sunday services, and had a table with information in our fellowship hall after services. Members of our congregation belong to several community groups that support the environment, including Sustainable Blacksburg, Ecumenical Environment Effort and the Environmental Coalition at Virginia Tech and a local chapter of the Sierra Club.