

Making the Journey to Better Health

Two Churches Grow and Green Their Faith

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It started with a book study of *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective* by Michael Schut after a few members of Grace Episcopal met Schut at a conference. The study led to an interfaith discussion about faith and care of the land and finally to a decision to become a GreenFaith-certified house of worship.

According to Green Faith's website, the GreenFaith Certification Program is, "is a nationally-recognized two-year program. It provides houses of worship with a holistic, well-supported and structured program to 'green' their worship, education, facilities and outreach." GreenFaith Certification addresses seven areas of competency:

Green" facility management

Community out-



Members of Grace Episcopal Church "Green Team" meet outside for worship.

reach and publicity

Environmental justice education and advocacy

Sustainable consumption training for members

Religious education for all ages

Eco-themed worship

Collaboration with multi-faith groups

The GreenFaith certification is based on princi-

ples of: spirituality, stewardship and justice.

Based on the previous study and forum, those at Grace Episcopal saw the GreenFaith certification as a means to live out their faith in terms of taking care of the Earth. During their two year certification process, members at Grace completed activities such as starting a community garden and weekly farmer's market, hosted a discussion with Muslim and Jewish leaders to talk about the different faith perspectives

Special points of interest:

- Learn how to decrease energy use in your congregation
- Learn how to affect policy from a faith-based prospective
- Explore faith-based environmental resources
- Learn how to make your home healthier

Two Churches Cont.

with regards to the Earth as well as doing an energy audit to improve the use of energy and other resources within the church facilities.

As a result of pursuing the GreenFaith certification, the membership of Grace has increased and members feel as if the process brought them together. Barriers encountered during the certification process included coordinating the efforts of a small group of people and finding the time to assess and make necessary changes.

When asked about what might be important to consider when pursuing GreenFaith certification, Liz Kabalka, a member of Grace Episcopal, said “Focus on the positive. Even a small change is a good change.”

Meanwhile, another Episcopal church in Chattanooga, St. Paul’s, is currently in the process of becoming Green Faith certified. Bruce Blohm, a member of St. Paul’s, first learned of GreenFaith after attending a conference and meeting the executive director. When asked why St. Paul’s decided to become GreenFaith certified, Blohm stated “it seems to integrate with who we strive to be as a faith community.”

Blohm also mentioned becoming certified is a way to live out one’s faith to help those in greatest need since minority



Many congregations who participate in GreenFaith plant community gardens

and poor communities suffer disproportionately from environmental injustices.

Though they are completing activities in the seven areas of certification, the main focus of St. Paul’s work is increasing opportunities for congregants and community members to spend time outdoors.

Many studies show being outside can have positive impacts on health from Attention Deficit Disorder to obesity to diabetes. Many people live in a such a way that they go from house to garage to work to garage to house without spending much time outside.

One challenge to becoming GreenFaith certified is to realize that not everyone is on

the same page and change occurs in small steps.

St. Paul’s members have noticed benefits to GreenFaith certification have included having a hands-on way to live out one’s faith and to take care of creation by taking steps to move in a positive direction.

When asked why faith communities should consider the GreenFaith Certification, Blohm remarks:

“It’s consistent with spiritual, mental and physical well-being to be good stewards of God’s creation. It is the common denominator for us human beings.”

Seven Tips for a Healthy Home

Contributed by David Borowski, Tennessee Department of Health Environmental Health



Every home can be a healthy home – designed, built, and maintained to support health.

A healthy home can prevent illnesses and injuries. Following the Seven Principles of Healthy Homes will promote good health and wellness for you and your family.

Seven Principles of Healthy Homes

Keep your home:

Dry: Damp houses provide a good environment for mites, roaches, rodents and molds.

Clean: Clean homes help reduce pest infestations and exposure to contaminants.

Pest-Free: Studies have shown exposure to mice and cockroaches can increase asthma attacks in children. Improper pesticide treatments for

pest infestations can worsen health problems, since pesticide residues in homes can pose health risks.

Safe: The majority of children's injuries occur in the home. Falls are the most frequent cause of residential injuries to children, followed by injuries from objects in the home, burns and poisonings.

Contaminant-Free:

Chemical exposures include lead, radon, carbon monoxide, pesticides, asbestos and environmental tobacco smoke. Exposures are often higher indoors than outdoors.

Ventilated: Studies have shown increasing the fresh air in a home improves respiratory health.

Maintained: Poorly-maintained homes are at risk for moisture and pest problems. Deteriorated lead-based paint in

homes built before 1978 is the primary cause of lead poisoning in children.

For more information visit the Tennessee Department of Health's Healthy Homes Website at:

<http://health.tn.gov/healthyhomes>

There you can find information for home buyers and renters; information about how to keep different rooms in the house safer; and information on a variety of topics like asthma, radon, lead and mold.

Our *Guide to a Healthy Home* booklet, a room by room description of how to maintain a healthy home, can be downloaded in English or Spanish.

Local Health Department Partners with Local School to Improve Health through Gardening

Contributed by: Cathy Montgomery, Williamson County Health Department



Children and staff work to prepare garden beds for planting

New Hope Academy, Harvest107 and the Williamson County Health Department teamed to develop raised-bed gardens at the school.

In an effort to showcase the collaborative partnership, garden project and kick-off spring planting, a ribbon-cutting ceremony was held Tuesday, May 13, 2014.

When the health department received funds from the State of Tennessee's Office of Minority Health and Disparities Elimination, they reached out to New Hope Academy with ideas to build and teach gardening tech-

niques and discuss the health benefits of eating vegetables with their students.

New Hope had connections with Gracie Pfaff, a 12-year-old home-schooled seventh grader. Gracie started the non-profit Harvest107, which plants vegetable gardens in food-insecure communities to cultivate sustainable food sources, while rooting communities in faith.

Her mission aligns nicely with the vocation of New Hope Academy. New Hope is an independent, non-denominational, not-for-profit institution that targets the spiritual, emotional,

intellectual, social and physical needs of their students and families.

Gardening activities kicked off the end of September with placement of raised beds and soil preparation. Five raised beds were built in the courtyard area of the school by Eagle Scout J. P. Gilliam. Children participating in the program began their farming adventures by learning about seeds and planting cool weather crops, including cabbages, lettuce, kale and turnip greens.

Other lessons provided included container gardening,

Local Health Department, Cont.



Children from New Hope Academy are ready to plant the garden

importance of fertilizing and nutritional benefits of foods being grown in the garden. Teachers at New Hope are using the gardens to teach children about earth science and relate many of the concepts of gardening to Bible scriptures. Grant funds were used to purchase lumber, hoses, tools, plants and gardening accessories for the project.

Throughout the program, students have been responsible for the daily watering, weed-

ing and collecting produce. A survey was collected from parents and the results indicated:

86% of children participating in the garden project tasted vegetables grown in the garden

49% stated their children consumed vegetables they had never tasted before

46% noticed their child eating more vegetables since

participating in the garden club.

The grant received by the Williamson County Health Department is part of a series of grants offered by the Office of Minority Health and Disparities Elimination to decrease health disparities across Tennessee through community engagement.

**Tennessee Department of Health
Office of Minority Health and Disparities Elimination Faith-Based Initiative**

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We're on the web!

<http://health.state.tn.us/dmhde/faith.shtml>

Mission: Protect, promote and improve the health and prosperity of Tennesseans."



In our journey to better health, we often think about the destination, avoiding detours and possible dead-ends like death and disease, how many pounds we'd like to lose and how many years we'd like to live.

However, by thinking in these terms, we often forget about the many steps along the way that lead us to our detours, dead ends and destination. This newsletter is an effort to highlight those small steps that will help us along our journey, as well as share success stories of communities of faith across Tennessee who are already focusing on those steps.

Faith-Based Environmental Programs

GreenFaith: Interfaith Partners for the Environment
www.greenfaith.org

Hazon: Jewish Inspiration. Sustainable Communities
www.hazon.org

National Religious Partnership for the Environment
www.nrpe.org

