

St. Paul's Episcopal Applies for GreenFaith Certification

By John Hainze

We learned about GreenFaith through the Ground for Hope - Wisconsin conference that was jointly sponsored with Interfaith Earth Network. 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. 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 of the Episcopal Church, 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 (managing board). 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. We hope to infuse all aspects of our parish life with a focus on the environment and sustainability. 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.

We submitted our application for the certification program to GreenFaith on May 1st. We expect to initiate the process after our acceptance in mid-May.