

# Edmonds Sustainability Heroes

## Edmonds United Methodist Church's Green Team



Front row from left to right: Mary Lou Barr, Pat Cross, Don Hallum, and Carolyn Chapel.  
Back row from left to right: Jerry Barr, Peggy Nystrom, Gayla Shoemake, and Sonja Adams.

*(On July 2, 2013, Cynthia Pruitt and Jim Stevens, members of the Mayor's Climate Protection Committee of Edmonds interviewed Carolyn Chapel and Gayla Shoemake, two members of the Green Team at the Edmonds United Methodist Church to learn this group's success story with increasing energy efficiency and sustainability at the church. The following article describes their motivation, efforts, and results.)*

Sometimes energy efficiency and sustainability prove quite contagious. About 8 years ago, Carolyn Chapel of the Edmonds United Methodist Church worked a notice into the church bulletin asking for interest in starting a green team to address climate change. This group today numbers 12 members. One of their keys they found along the way is value of leading by example. Because this group has since become viewed as a touchstone for greening the church and its operations, members of the team note that others now contact them for advice on making their events or interests more sustainable.

First, the team looked at the use of Styrofoam cups at the church and the cradle-to-grave impacts of that material. Because they knew some folks already used only washable cups for their functions, they also knew it was doable for all functions. They responded successfully to concerns voiced about the energy, soap, and water consumed by dishwashers with the numbers showing Styrofoam's impact. To paraphrase Carolyn, it didn't save the world, but it gave them a great and visible starting point for the rest of the things that they wanted to accomplish. Gayla Shoemake, one of the original team members and its current chair, said that Dave Walters, the facility manager for the church, became not just a believer in what they were doing, but a willing participant, when he saw them washing cups themselves and sorting refuse for recycling.

One of the biggest things this group tackled was the replacement of the church's heating system. The old furnace was the focus of a two-year project that included continuous efforts, beginning with researching existing conditions, the options, and field trips to other example sites. It concluded when the new system was financed and installed. Gayla describes it as really cool because of digital controls that enable it to be adjusted remotely. It is also zoned so that it only is called upon to heat areas being used. Because of its heightened energy efficiency, the church was not only able to leverage utility rebates for selecting it, but its trustees were also successful in acquiring funding from the parent church organization to assist with its purchase and installation. The first year savings alone amounted to \$6000.

The green team has worked on a number of other ideas and programs, including Earth Day events, bicycle advocacy, and water conservation. Working with the larger congregation has given them a unique perspective on what produces the best results with sizeable groups. They recommend starting small with something that makes a difference, walking the talk, recognizing that change takes time and not becoming discouraged, doing something different to help gain a foothold, using other organizations (utilities, community groups, governmental entities) to assist, and involving the larger group whenever possible to find optimal solutions.

Carolyn looks to the future to explain her motivation in starting this committee. She sees what climate change is on track to do to the world owned by her children and grandchildren, and she believes there is a moral issue that needs addressing. Gayla points first to the past and her mother's influence. She also notes as a child she grew up in a farm town in Kansas that had been so dry that her area became a topic for an article in Life magazine. Clearly both demonstrate a firm commitment to the cause of sustainability, and it is obvious their team's efforts are enhanced by their enthusiasm and energy that have proven downright infectious within their faith community.