



Sustainable Jersey® and the Faith Community *A Natural Connection*

With over 8,000 faith-based institutions in New Jersey, including multiple institutions in nearly every municipality, the faith-based sector represents an important audience for SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® Green Teams to engage.

This document describes some reasons why faith-based groups can be important to your SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® efforts, and provides tips about how best to approach and involve them.

Why are faith-based institutions important in the sustainability movement?

From our nation's independence, to the Civil Rights movement and beyond, faith-based groups have played a crucial role in shaping public discourse, behavior, and policy. The large networks and sense of community that these institutions provide have earned faith-based groups the nickname of "movement incubators." Faith groups speak to the moral and ethical implications of social issues – a key framework for any movement's success.

Environmental concerns, and the vision of sustainability, represent an important moral challenge. Faith-based institutions can help this movement reach its potential. Their outreach efforts can touch thousands of people at once, and, like municipal government, faith-based institutions own and operate buildings which can be 'greened.' In addition, as non-profit institutions without a government affiliation, houses of worship, faith-based schools and other faith-based institutions often have a unique freedom to speak directly about the moral, spiritual values related to sustainability, and pave the way for new and innovative best practices.

How are faith-based sites engaging in environmental work?

A growing number of New Jersey's faith-based institutions are responding to environmental concerns in important ways:

- **'Greening' of building operations:** From vegetable gardens, to solar installations and energy conservation practices that have saved tens of thousands of dollars, more and more faith-based groups are modeling best practices in sustainable consumption.
- **Education and outreach:** Through worship services and educational programs held each and every week, faith-based groups offer countless opportunities to educate their members and communities. More and more congregations are preaching and teaching about environmental concerns, encouraging members to take action for the Earth.
- **The GreenFaith Certification Program:** A growing number of New Jersey houses of worship have enrolled in the GreenFaith Certification Program, a 2 year leadership program for houses of worship that is similar in design to SUSTAINABLE JERSEY®. Participants complete a series of environmental requirements in a variety of areas—from eco-themed worship services and religious education on the environment, to 'greening' of building operations, and environmental justice education and advocacy—and they receive coaching, support and resources from GreenFaith along the way. Once they complete the required activities, they are certified as a GreenFaith Sanctuary. There are over 20 houses of worship in NJ currently participating in this program. These institutions represent the vanguard of religious-environmental work in the Garden State.

Why should my SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® Green Team connect with faith-based institutions?

Faith-based institutions can enhance your municipality's work in the SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® program in many ways:

- **Maximize outreach:** Your municipality is undertaking many 'green' action steps, and publicity is a key to those initiatives' success. Houses of worship, faith-based schools, and other faith-based institutions in your community can help to promote your efforts by publicizing events in their newsletters, on their websites, and through promotional posters. They may also be interested in partnering with you to organize or host events.
- **Share successes:** Many faith-based groups are glad to share their 'green' success stories and provide examples that can help municipal efforts. For instance, a religious school may have an environmental lesson plan or a green challenge that has worked well, and can be used in the public schools.
- **Gain points:** While there is not yet a point allocation within SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® for faith-based outreach in particular, these institutions can help municipalities accrue points in a number of ways. For instance, a house of worship may be interested in hosting or helping to organize a community education and outreach program. In addition, the SUSTAINABLE

JERSEY® program affords 10 points in the “Other” category, providing municipalities with an opportunity to collaborate with faith-based institutions. These “other” initiatives are classified as: “Innovative approaches...not outlined elsewhere in the Sustainable Jersey program,” with a “demonstrable impact on sustainability and be a model that can be replicated by other towns.”

How does my SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® team connect with faith-based institutions?

There are several steps to consider when reaching out to faith-based institutions, and several ways to make your outreach most effective:

- 1 Identify the faith communities most likely to support SUSTAINABLE JERSEY®:** How many houses of worship, faith-based schools, and other faith-based institutions (such as religious community centers) are in your municipality, what are their defining characteristics, and what is the history, if any, of their connection to the municipality? Who are the movers and shakers, and where is there likely to be the most leverage? Which institutions already have Green Teams? Use this information to be strategic in your first outreach steps.
- 2 Offer a presentation:** In an effort to build a better relationship with the faith-based communities and to encourage their participation, offer an introductory presentation on SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® to a gathering of these institutions.
- 3 Reach out to key contacts:** Faith-based institutions are complex, and it’s important to connect with the appropriate person at each institution. Once you identify the key contact - the clergy person, Green Team leader, or an interested and active lay leader - reach out directly to that person by phone or email. Provide SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® materials and information. Invite them to an upcoming introductory presentation or event.
- 4 Make a specific, modest first ask:** As organizations largely run by volunteers, many faith-based institutions have limited time and energy. As you talk with the key contact, be specific in your ask. Would you like that person to join the municipality’s Green Team, promote a specific event, publish an article in their newsletter, or collaborate on a project? Define next steps in detail, outlining target dates. Be sure to follow-up with him/her consistently, while being considerate of that volunteer’s time limits.
- 5 Get clergy involved - perhaps through their communication skills:** Often, clergy are skilled communicators who are accustomed to speaking publicly on a range of topics. Identify clergy in your community who are talented public speakers. Invite them to describe the values or beliefs that support your SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® efforts.

We hope these suggestions help SUSTAINABLE JERSEY® Green Teams connect more effectively with faith-based groups. Questions? Contact GreenFaith’s Stacey Kennealy at skennealy@greenfaith.org.