



The Faith Communities Environmental Network A Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative Network Leading the Way!

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February 2022

Since its founding in 2016, a central mission of the Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative has been to foster and promote networks – sector-based organizations, groups and individuals all working to combat the climate crisis. Networks span a broad range of sectors including business, transportation, energy, conservation, climate action, and agriculture for example – and involve citizens, scientists, business leaders and activists... all working to promote environmental justice, implement legislative initiatives to curb fossil fuel emissions, and move the region to net zero.

Among the Climate Collaborative networks, the Faith Communities Environmental Network (FCEN) is the “oldest” and most robust. Composed of thirty-five (and growing) diverse faith communities on Cape Cod and the Islands, FCEN members are committed to preserving Earth through eco-justice and to accomplishing its mission through education, activism, and sharing best practices.

FCEN leads by example. Since its formation in 2016, FCEN has supported the installation of solar panels at faith institutions across the Cape and Islands. Recent projects include installations at the Unitarian Church of Barnstable (UCB) and St. Christopher’s Episcopal in Chatham. Before FCEN’s official launch, however, faith communities were already leading the charge on green energy. The Pilgrim Congregational Church in Harwich Port, First Parish Unitarian Universalist of Brewster, Federated Church of Orleans, and Falmouth Fellowship UU had all installed solar arrays at their facilities, with many of these houses of worship exploring the option to add still more solar in coming years.

While FCEN supports solar installation work, each congregation funds its own solar projects. For example, UCB funded its solar installation with a combination of \$10,000 raised by the congregation and a loan from the Capital Endowment Fund. FCEN works to support these efforts by sharing best practices with communities of faith, hosting informational presentations, and partnering with Cape Light Compact and MassSave on free energy audits and energy improvements.

FCEN co-chairs Susan Starkey and Reverend Brian McGurk of St. Christopher’s Episcopal Church in Chatham share the view that the FCEN’s moral imperative to care for our Earth Home and all living things, especially those who are disproportionately and negatively affected by climate change and the degradation of the interconnected web of life of which we are a small

part. Lew Stern, an FCEN member and leader of the Falmouth Fellowship UU, views FCEN's role as multi-dimensional and adds, "When we install solar on our churches, temples, mosques, and other houses of worship, celebration, and meditation, we not only reduce our reliance on carbon-based energy and its negative impact on Earth and our lives, but we also save the planet for our children and future generations."

This is the crux of FCEN's mission. Installing solar is not just a beneficial financial investment for faith communities, it is an opportunity to live their commitment to serve as stewards of the natural world. This work is seen as a moral imperative for FCEN's faith institutions because their members share a consistent ethos with faith traditions around the world to protect the earth and all living things.

Installing solar, however, is but a small fraction of the way FCEN leads as stewards of the natural world. For example, FCEN has

- Hosted a Solar and Sustainability Tour at the Unitarian Church of Barnstable where over 100 people met solar installers and EV auto dealers to learn more about electric vehicles.
- Focused on transforming their food services, both through shifting away from using paper products and instituting composting in church kitchens
- Divested from fossil fuel companies both individually and as congregations.
- Inspired local activism among congregants and support memberships within allied organizations such as the Association to Preserve Cape Cod, 350CC, Sierra Club, and, of course, the Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative.

Perhaps FCEN's strongest asset, however, is its focus on sharing best practices for the broader community. It operates as part of a network of networks, collaborating with scientific, public, private, business, and other groups who share the commitment to the environment and to proactively addressing the climate crisis. Representatives of the faith communities come together for monthly meetings and sometimes daily to provide information, readings, resources, and best practices on environmental justice issues. As Stern notes, "we share readings, music, resources, hopes, and fears, best practices, stories, and emotions that shake us up and bring us together in the common bond of love for our planet and each other."

The multifaceted and successful work of FCEN on Cape Cod and the Islands is a testament to the power of community networks, activism, and the moral imperative to do what is right. Stern concludes, "To accomplish this kind of impact, it takes more than faith. It takes the expertise, energies, and resources of the entire network of networks--science, economics, political influence, and moral commitment."

The Cape Cod Climate Change Collaborative is steadfast in supporting the vital work of the Faith Communities Environmental Network. If you would like more information on how you or your faith institution might connect with FCEN or learn more about member solar projects, please visit the [FCEN webpage on the Climate Collaborative website here](#).