



Seven-Year Plan for Religious-Environmental Leadership

**Presented to the Alliance for Religions and Conservation
September 2009**

Introduction

GreenFaith, a US-based, interfaith environmental coalition, is pleased to present the following 7-year plan to the Alliance for Religions and Conservation. This plan, which reflects the long-term goal which GreenFaith aims to attain by 2025, includes the following components:

1. Executive Summary
2. GreenFaith's Mission
3. GreenFaith's Core Values
4. A description of GreenFaith's Long-Range Goal
5. A Description of GreenFaith's 7-Year Plan and Goals

In this document, we have strived for practicality. We want the document, and the time we invest in it, to bear real fruit, and to be a living document that we use and adapt as circumstances change. Seven years represents a long time frame for a planning document, a time period during which the relationship between religion and the environment, and between US society and the environment, will change in ways we cannot presently anticipate. Because of this, we have created the first three years of this plan in greater detail than the final four years.

We look forward to monitoring our progress towards the goals articulated for the first three years, and to making the goals for the final four years more specific, as time passes.

1. Executive Summary

The following is a summary of GreenFaith’s mission, core values, long range goal, and the goals which GreenFaith has identified for our 7-Year Plan. The goals are divided into two sections – goals for years 1-3, and goals for years 4-7.

GreenFaith’s Mission, Core Values, and Long-Range Goal

GreenFaith’s 7-Year Plan is written in the context of our Mission, Core Values, and Long-Range Goal.

GreenFaith’s Mission is to educate, inspire, equip and mobilize people and institutions of diverse religious traditions as environmental leaders.

GreenFaith’s three core values are Spirit, Stewardship and Justice.

Spirit: GreenFaith affirms the religious basis for environmental care and believes that the human soul is strengthened through a strong relationship with the natural world.

Stewardship: GreenFaith affirms that consumption can become a source of ecological restoration, and that moderation in material consumption is a mark of spiritual maturity.

Justice: GreenFaith recognizes that marginalized communities suffer worst from pollution, and that we must empower the most vulnerable to gain a healthy environment.

By 2025 GreenFaith aims to educate, inspire, equip and mobilize over 1 million individuals and thousands of religious institutions to alter fundamentally their relationship to the earth, their consumption habits, and their participation in civil society, to create an environmentally just, sustainable culture in the United States.

Goals for Years 1-3

The goals in this section of our Plan are organized into four basic categories. One category reflects programming under the title of “Membership” Programming. Programming in this category is designed to build the capacity of individuals and institutions for religious-environmental leadership. Three of the categories – Spirit, Stewardship and Justice – reflect our core values, which are described above.

Category: Membership Programming

Goal 1: Develop Membership Programs for individuals and institutions.

Category: Spirit

Goal 1: Develop on-line or distance education capacity for ordained leaders.

Goal 2: Develop user-friendly activities which “mainstream” reflection on spiritual experience in nature.

Goal 3: Develop educational curricula for teens and adults with *The Story of Stuff* and at least one major environmental group. Develop educational curricula for children.

Category: Stewardship

Goal 1: Develop a series of sustainable consumption resources.

Goal 2: Develop energy conservation training program for houses of worship.

Category: Environmental Justice

Goal 1: Create a user-friendly method for religious leaders to analyze environmental justice issues in their own region.

Goal 2: Develop a Program to train faith-based groups to participate in environmental justice advocacy and litigation.

Goals for Years 4-7

The goals described in this section focus primarily in three areas – publicity, networks, and coalition building, and include the possibility of our developing relationships with religious organizations in other countries.

Goal 1: Develop an outstanding on-line presence which actively supports increased religious-environmental leadership.

Goal 2: Play a leading role in developing a US professional association of religious-environmentalism.

Goal 3: Explore partnerships with US-based denominations and Religious NGO’s

Goal 4: Explore international collaboration and partnerships.

2. GreenFaith's Mission

Our mission is simple.

*GreenFaith
educates, inspires, equips and mobilizes
people and institutions
of diverse religious traditions
as environmental leaders.*

There are four aspects of this mission statement which we wish to emphasize.

- a. **We believe that each of the four verbs – ‘educate, inspire, equip and mobilize’ - is vital to accomplishing our mission**, and we strive to develop programs and resources that support all four. Education alone is not an adequate response to the challenges facing religious communities; nor is ‘inspiring,’ ‘equipping’ or ‘mobilizing’ religious groups. We believe that a holistic approach which engages the heart (inspire), the mind (educate), the hands (equip), and the feet (mobilize) is vital to our success.
- b. **GreenFaith works with individuals and religious institutions because we believe that both are critical** to helping the religious-environmental movement reach its potential. Frequently, we find that US religious institutions are at the early stages of engaging environmental concerns. In such institutions, the leadership of key individuals is fundamental to progress. In a smaller but growing number of institutions, there is institutional readiness to focus on the environment. In these cases, GreenFaith is prepared to offer support for genuine institution-wide engagement.
- c. **Religious and cultural diversity are valuable to us** and we believe that all traditions with which we have the privilege of working represent distinct worldviews, cultures, and sets of practices which we celebrate. Simultaneously, we believe that building stronger positive relationships between people of diverse faiths is an important mark of our work. One of the great strengths and promises of US culture is its ability, at its best, to enable people of diverse traditions to learn mutual respect, to live in harmonious community, and to enjoy each other’s distinctiveness. We want GreenFaith to reinforce these aspects of US culture, and to offer them as a model for the wider religious community.
- d. **GreenFaith exists to promote strong religious environmental leadership**. The religiously-based movements which we most respect – the US Civil Rights Movement, Gandhi’s Satyagraha Movement, and others – involve strong leadership, risk-taking, long-range vision, commitment to values, and genuine courage. We believe that this quality of leadership, and the benefits that it creates for the wider community, are the hallmark of genuine religious life and the gift which religious communities are given to offer to society. Simply put, GreenFaith believes in putting belief into action, and in helping the religious community be a positive force for real change.

3. GreenFaith's Core Values

GreenFaith's work flows from three core values. In our conversations with leaders from diverse religious and ethnic/cultural communities, we find these values affirmed repeatedly, and we believe that they represent a substantial shared human religious-environmental heritage. Each religious tradition has its own way of understanding and articulating these values, and we do not claim that our manner of expressing these adequately represents each tradition's perspective. Similarly, the priorities which communities place on these values differs depending on their socio-economic and cultural settings. But we offer our succinct understandings of these values because we have found them useful to engage diverse traditions, and to provide a starting-place for interreligious dialogue.

Spirit

GreenFaith affirms the basis in sacred writings and religious teachings for environmental care. We also believe that, because Creation is a source of awe and a testament to the creativity and sublime power of the divine, that the human soul is strengthened through a strong relationship with the natural world.

GreenFaith addresses this value in several ways.

- We educate and train ordained leaders to recognize and integrate their experience of the sacred in nature into their teaching and public speaking, spiritual life, liturgical/ritual leadership and pastoral care.
- We offer outdoor experiences to celebrate, affirm and nourish ordained and laypersons' relationship with the sacred in nature.
- We educate and encourage clergy and laypersons to recognize and connect the sacred in nature with their own religious tradition.

Stewardship

GreenFaith affirms that humanity's consumption habits, which currently cause massive ecological harm, can be transformed into a source of restoration and healing for the earth. We believe that religion views moderation in material consumption as a mark of moral maturity.

GreenFaith addresses this value in several ways.

- We equip ordained leaders to speak out on the moral basis for sustainable consumption habits – individually and collectively.
- We help diverse religious groups adopt sustainable consumption policies and practices, reducing their own impact on the earth.

- We empower religious institutions to educate and mobilize their members to develop sustainable consumption habits, and to foster such habits in their spheres of influence.

Justice

GreenFaith affirms that religious communities must empower and assist poor or marginalized communities, and the beyond-human community, from a degraded or toxic environment. We recognize that these marginalized communities suffer disproportionately from environmental degradation, and that religion affirms a shared human responsibility to protect and empower the most vulnerable so that their inherent dignity is respected.

GreenFaith addresses this value in several ways.

- We educate and equip religious groups to analyze the injustices in their area that result from environmental degradation, and to understand the impacts of this degradation on the most vulnerable within their communities.
- We provide training and resources to support environmental justice advocacy by communities of faith.
- We seek to build powerful coalitions through grass-roots organizing in diverse religious communities to address environmental justice issues.

In Appendix A, we present a more detailed statement of beliefs and values which guide our work and our advocacy.

4. GreenFaith's Long-Range Goal

In 2006, GreenFaith's Board of Directors affirmed an ambitious, long-range goal for GreenFaith's work.

By 2025 GreenFaith will educate, inspire, equip and mobilize over 1 million individuals and thousands of religious institutions to alter fundamentally their relationship to the earth, their consumption habits, and their participation in civil society, to create an environmentally just, sustainable culture in the United States. GreenFaith will work with and through the religious community and communicate from a religious, ethical foundation, while focusing ultimately on the transformation of society.

There are three points which we wish to emphasize in relation to this statement.

- Our aim is to have large-scale impact.** We understand that the numbers within this goal are extremely ambitious, and we are dedicated to reaching them.

- b. **The words “alter fundamentally” are an important aspect of this goal.** We are committed to articulating measurably what this means. We have developed measures which we use to evaluate houses of worship’s performance in relation to this phrase.
- c. **Our goal’s focus is US society’s transformation.** Religious values are our inspiration and religious communications our organizational base – but the wider society is the ultimate focus of our efforts.

5. GreenFaith's 7-Year Plan

The following is a description of the goals of GreenFaith's 7-year Plan. Please note that the goals listed here reflect programmatic goals. Goals related to fundraising, board development, communications and staff development are not included, though our accomplishing our programmatic goals will depend on our ability to meet these capacity-related goals.

Our Plan is divided into two basic timeframes – years 1-3 and years 4-7. The goals for the first three years are more specific, and more focused on specific programmatic accomplishments. The goals for years 4-7 are more focused on tasks related to publicity, networks, and coalition building, including the possibility of partnerships with organizations in other countries.

This division is, in many ways, an artificial one, as the lines between our programmatic development and our communications and networking overlap to a greater degree than this document suggests. Nonetheless, we have organized the document in this way and plan to implement work in relation to various goals as circumstances and opportunities warrant.

Goals for Years 1-3

The goals in this section of our Plan are organized into four basic categories. One category reflects programming under the title of "Membership" Programming. Programming in this category is designed to build the capacity of individuals and institutions for religious-environmental leadership. Three of the categories – Spirit, Stewardship and Justice – reflect our core values, which are described above.

Category: Membership Programming

Goal 1: Develop Membership Programs for individuals and institutions

GreenFaith's long-range goal focuses on engaging large numbers of people, inspiring and equipping them to change their behavior in relationship to the environment, and mobilizing them to advocate for strong environmental policies. One of GreenFaith's main vehicles for creating this change will be through our Membership Programs – for individuals and institutions.

Our research and experience have taught us that the audiences with whom we work – individuals and institutions - can be divided into three basic categories. We call these categories "Getting Started's," "Building Leadership's," and "High Performers." We are in the process of developing a list of the characteristics of each of these audiences, and the types of resources and programs that are best suited to each. After we finalize this list of characteristics and needs for each audience, we will develop membership programs for each distinct audience, test these plans, and launch them publicly. This will result in Membership Programs for six distinct audiences, programs designed to move GreenFaith towards accomplishing our long-range goal.

Currently, GreenFaith has developed the first stages of programs for the High Performer category, for both individuals and institutions. Our Fellowship Program is designed to educate and equip lay and ordained leaders for effective religious-environmental leadership. Our Certification Program is designed to educate and equip houses of worship towards a similar end. During the first three years of our seven-year plan, we will strengthen these programs and use them as models for our Getting Started and Building Leadership levels of Membership Programs.

Category: Spirit

Goal 1: Develop on-line or distance education capacity for ordained leaders

The vast majority of US clergy still graduate from seminary without any eco-theological education, which prevents them from providing leadership in ways that they are uniquely able to offer. Clergy who do not understand the basis for environmental care as presented in sacred and theological writings will not be able to serve as strong environmental leaders.

GreenFaith has developed experience conducting education for ordained leaders in the areas of Bible, theology, sermons, and religious education. During the coming three years, we will develop the capacity to conduct effective educational programming for lay and ordained leaders using electronic technology, and through writing and public speaking. These programs will educate and equip clergy to function as effective teachers and public speakers on the environment.

Goal 2: Develop user-friendly activities which “mainstream” reflection on spiritual experience in nature

Through our educational programming, we have found that almost all US citizens are able to recall powerful spiritual experiences which took place outdoors, experiences which carry powerful emotions and deep meaning. We have also found that fewer than 5% of all people have ever discussed these experiences in a public group or educational setting, due to several complex cultural and religious forces.

GreenFaith believes that these experiences are one of the most important yet underutilized assets available to the US religious-environmental movement. During the coming three years, we will develop a user-friendly, theologically-solid group discussion program to enable diverse houses of worship to provide their members with opportunities to discuss their spiritual experiences in nature and to channel the energy present in these experiences into environmental leadership.

Goal 3: Develop educational curricula for teens and adults with The Story of Stuff and at least one major environmental group. Develop educational curricula for children.

GreenFaith believes that there is a shortage of quality religious-educational curricula for US audiences. GreenFaith plans to develop several educational curricula, with versions for adults and teens. In particular, we plan to create curricula in cooperation with *The Story of Stuff*, a widely-viewed web-based video focused on sustainable consumption. We also plan to identify

one major environmental group with whom we will partner to create curricula for teens and adults. We have begun exploratory conversations with the Union of Concerned Scientists in this regard. We plan to create versions of each of these curricula in Christian, Jewish and Islamic versions at a minimum.

We also believe that there is a shortage of curricula for children. GreenFaith plans to create curricula for children – in versions for Christian, Jewish and Islamic audiences at a minimum. Because of their developmental stage, the content addressed in children’s curricula will differ substantially from the content in the teen and adult curricula.

Category: Stewardship

Goal 1: Develop a series of sustainable consumption resources for faith-based groups.

GreenFaith will develop a series of resources to enable members of religious communities to learn a religious basis for various aspects or areas of sustainable consumption, to learn practical strategies for implementing sustainable consumption habits, and to read success stories featuring people from diverse religious backgrounds. We have already begun to create such a resource on sustainable food habits, and we will initiate research soon on solar energy.

Goal 2: Develop energy conservation training program for houses of worship.

GreenFaith has developed expertise in conducting energy audits for US houses of worship, having conducted over 70 of these audits in the past four years. We have gained an understanding of the best practices in this area, and the ways in which they differ from the energy auditing model that most utilities and energy services companies use.

We plan to create a training program to pass this knowledge on to a national audience. We will develop a training curriculum, test it through training sessions conducted in-person and on-line, and explore the idea of partnering with a national energy audit training firm to develop a certification specific to houses of worship.

Category: Environmental Justice

Goal 1: Create a user-friendly method for religious leaders to analyze environmental justice issues in their own region.

While many US religious groups recognize the issues of social justice that are an implicit part of many environmental concerns, very few are aware of ways that they can use existing research and publicly available information to identify those issues in their own community.

GreenFaith has developed expertise in using publicly available information and on-line resources to identify the specific environmental justice issues in communities around the US. We plan to develop the capacity to train congregational activists to use these tools and to help them develop partnerships with existing environmental justice groups and activists.

Goal 2: Develop a program to train faith-based groups to participate in environmental justice advocacy and litigation.

In the US setting, frequently the only way to stop pollution in poor communities, or to help these communities secure a healthier environment, is through advocacy with environmental regulators and litigation against polluters or lax regulators. Most religious groups lack experience with environmental advocacy, and even more lack experience with environmental justice litigation. Again, GreenFaith has developed experience in both areas, and we plan to develop training resources to empower a larger number of religious groups to offer leadership in this manner.

We feel particularly strongly about the importance of this goal. We know that most poor communities in the US suffer from substantial environmental health threats, whether through air pollution, water pollution, or toxic exposures. Most religious groups that choose to engage environmental concerns do not focus their attention on these issues, despite their importance. We hope to play a meaningful role in increasing the level of religious leadership in these areas.

Goals for Years 4-7

The goals described in this section focus primarily in three areas – publicity, networks, and coalition building, and include the possibility of our developing relationships with religious organizations in other countries.

Goal 1: Develop an outstanding on-line presence which actively supports increased religious-environmental leadership.

To date, much religious-environmental activism has taken place on a local or regional level, where face-to-face meetings and personal relationships play a key role in facilitating progress. While this is a necessary part of the early stage of most movements, GreenFaith believes that religious-environmentalism needs an increasing level of virtual connectivity, enabling people from diverse locations to learn, share resources, learn best practices, and develop more extended networks of collaboration and mutual support.

To this end, GreenFaith will develop a plan to foster the growth of an on-line community which addresses these needs. We will collaborate actively with other groups, when feasible, to identify these needs and to accomplish this goal.

Goal 2: Play a leading role in developing a US professional association of religious-environmentalism.

Currently, US religious-environmentalism has no central gathering place – whether organizational or virtual – where best practices are determined, continuing education or credentialing offered, professional networking promoted, and the future of the field discussed. The lack of this capacity – which is relatively unimportant in a movement’s early years, will in GreenFaith’s view become a significant liability in the coming years, as religious-environmentalism becomes more widespread.

GreenFaith plans to conduct exploratory conversations in the first three years of our Plan to identify partner-groups which have an interest in partnering to develop such an association. We will then proceed to work with these partners to develop such an association, or to create a series of activities that address the needs identified by those participating in the planning conversations.

Goal 3: Explore partnerships with US-based denominations and Religious NGO's

Many US-based denominational bodies are facing significant cutbacks in budget and staffing, due to changes in the religious landscape. These cutbacks hinder denominations' ability to design or conduct programming on a substantial level in relation to specific issues such as the environment. At the same time, these denominations continue to administer and facilitate many of the most valuable communications networks in the US religious world, reaching thousands of congregations and their lay and ordained leaders through postal and electronic communication, and through hosting annual and regional gatherings.

GreenFaith will develop a series of opportunities for denominations to partner with us to offer environmental programming through their networks. These partnerships will range from one-time program opportunities to longer range collaborative ventures across various areas of religious environmentalism. Our goal is to find mutually beneficial ways to help denominational networks play a strong role in promoting religious-environmental leadership.

We will pursue similar activities with large religious NGOs in the US. Many of these NGO's have an interest in engaging environmental issues and have well-established networks, but lack expertise in the area of environmentalism. GreenFaith will seek to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with NGO's, with the goal of helping them play a strong role in promoting religious-environmental leadership.

Goal 4: Explore international collaboration and partnerships.

One of the greatest promises of religious-environmentalism is the fact that religion is a global phenomenon which crosses national borders and which, at its best, can unite people of many nations around similar values. GreenFaith will explore ways that religious-environmental groups in different countries can establish mutually beneficial relationships – whether through sharing resources, serving to administer each other's programs in diverse geographic settings, or other opportunities.

Conclusion

GreenFaith appreciates the opportunity to present these goals to the Alliance of Religions and Conservation. These goals represent the results of our reflection on our experience working with a range of religious groups in the US, our assessment of their needs, and our sense of the opportunities facing the religious-environmental movement in the US. We look forward to working to accomplish them, and to sharing them with ARC and other participants in the Windsor meeting this November.

Appendix A



Called to Protect the Earth Principles for Religious-Environmental Advocacy

Introduction

These principles establish the moral, theological themes that support GreenFaith's work as a religiously based advocate for the protection of the earth. We believe these principles are consistent with the teachings of the world's great religious traditions.

1. The Earth as the Beloved Creation and Possession of the Divine

Consistent with the world's great religions, we affirm that the **earth is creation, possession, and gift of the Divine**. Creation has an **intrinsic value** that cannot be defined solely by its usefulness to humanity. While the material world does not capture the full extent of the Eternal, GreenFaith affirms that the earth and **the entire cosmos are a sacred blessing, a sign and embodiment of the generosity, creativity and power of the Holy**. GreenFaith's advocacy will reflect this sense of the earth as creation and possession of the Creator with an innate worth and destiny.

2. Humanity as Steward Commanded to Care for the Earth

In relation to the earth, humanity's primary role is that of a **steward, reflecting an understanding that we are embedded in earth's web of life**, and therefore steward an earth to which we also belong. Stewardship is a **service that humanity is commanded to offer to all creation, a multi-generational trust** to protect the earth as **a sacred commons for life present and future, and not for short-term selfish use**. Our advocacy will support the strengthening of this ethic of stewardship

3. Environmental Justice, Environmental Racism

All people suffer from environmental degradation, **but the poor around the world suffer its worst impacts**. In the United States, research shows conclusively that **people of color and the poor suffer the impacts of environmental harm disproportionately**.

GreenFaith strongly affirms, consistent with the values of **compassion and justice** present in every world religion, that the **Divine commands humanity to care for the poor and vulnerable**, protecting them from environmental injustice, racism and harm. We will advocate for policies that ensure that **an unfair burden of environmental harm does not fall on those most vulnerable communities**.

4. Protecting All Living Things and the Web of Creation

Consistent with our belief that the entire cosmos is an embodiment of the creative power of the Holy, we affirm that humanity is commanded to **protect the diversity of the natural world**, through **protecting different forms of life and the ecosystems** that support them. Recognizing the serious threats that some forms of human activity pose to the earth, we will advocate for policies that support the protection of endangered life forms and ecosystems.

5. Uncertainty, Precaution and Consumption

We recognize that **scientific uncertainty sometimes exists** in the process of environmental decision-making. In taking our positions, we will rely on a **preponderance of scientific evidence**, relying on data gathered by groups whose **objectivity** and credentials are well recognized. We also affirm **that uncertainty does not justify inaction** environmentally, particularly in cases where the risk to human health and the environment seem probable.

Because of the **extent and magnitude of current environmental threats** caused by humanity, we **affirm the Precautionary Principle** as a basis for our advocacy. This Principle, in recognition of current serious environmental threats, calls on society to exercise **caution and prudent restraint** in environmental decision-making and the production and consumption of resources. The Principle also calls for decision-makers to **meet human needs and to protect the rights of workers, local communities and the general public, in a manner that causes the least environmental harm**. We find this Principle consistent with the world's religious teachings concerning the dangers of impulsive overconsumption, and which link spiritual and moral maturity with **moderate, ethical use of earth's resources**. We will advocate for policies that support a precautionary approach to environmental planning and decision-making.