

Edmonds Sustainability Heroes

Gayle Leberg and Stephen Ernst



(On July 22, 2016, Cynthia Pruitt and Hank Landau, members of the Mayor's Climate Protection Committee of Edmonds interviewed Gayle Leberg and Stephen Ernst. Both Gayle and Stephen are members of the Edmonds Unitarian Universalist Congregation (EUUC)).

Right from the start, Gayle Leberg and Stephen Ernst made it clear that the Edmonds Unitarian Universalist Congregation (EUUC) had overwhelmingly voted to enact a congregational stand on global warming. Gayle and Stephen are committed to implementing this stand and reduce EUUC's production of heat-trapping gases.

That work has started with several building improvements. These improvements include replacing existing windows in the 70-year old building with double-paned ones. And, as a result of an energy audit, they replaced their ceiling flood lights with CFLs. They have also installed a high-efficiency furnace which is zoned to distribute temperature control to the right place at

the right time with minimal energy spent heating and cooling unused spaces. They have also installed a bike rack. In the future they hope to mount solar panels on the roof.

Gayle and Stephen are members of EUUC's Peace and Justice Committee, which leads the church's sustainability efforts. The committee has initiated several projects over a period of several years, aimed at raising the congregation's consciousness including:

- Placing a highly visible chart in a way that encourages every member to calculate their carbon footprint, and then note it on the chart. Nearby, a poster shows changes that members can make in their household to reduce that footprint. Each person was asked to put a dot on the changes they had completed, thereby showing the collective efforts of the congregation.
- The committee has also provided information to the congregation on the types of food that would contribute to reducing their carbon footprint.
- Gayle and Stephen both told of being influenced by the coming together of the Interfaith Action Committee (IAC) in Edmonds. EUUC had a leadership role in both of the events put on by IAC, "Prayers for Our Planet," and "Lift Up Our Voices For the Planet."
- Congregation members had testified about the negative carbon footprint of the proposed oil terminal at Cherry Point, Bellingham. To deepen the impact of their testimony, they provided key points of their testimony to the congregation and encouraged others to pick some of those points to base letters of opposition on.

Several other efforts influenced how the congregation thought about global warming. One was a workshop on Joanna Macy's book, Active Hope. Another was a book group's study of Naomi Klein's book, This Changes Everything.

Both Gayle and Stephen said that they feel a responsibility to share the values of sustainability with the broader Edmonds community including the larger faith community. They explained their view that global warming is a moral issue, using slavery in comparison. Faith institutions/churches are uniquely qualified to address moral issues. Doing what the church can do to reduce its carbon footprint is "walking their talk." In addition, they are saving money. They would definitely recommend that others explore similar efforts.