

Quick Guide for Congregations Introducing and Engaging sustainislandhome.org

Climate Change and the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church has a long engagement in Care of Creation, and, in this momentous time of documented and alarming impacts of global warming on the earth's ecosystems and life of all kinds, significant and comprehensive commitments were made at the 79th General Convention in July 2018. Click [here](#) to see the numerous Care of Creation and Environmental Stewardship policies Episcopalians endorsed at this historic gathering.

The issues of concern included environmental justice; water; carbon taxes; tree planting; supporting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement; and climate and refugees, among others.

The General Convention also affirmed the importance of walking the talk and changing habits - as individuals and communities - so that Episcopalians can support and lead efforts to find and implement climate solutions. Those solutions include acting on the knowledge that our choices in the areas of nutrition, recycling, powering our homes, and local and air transportation can decrease harmful emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases.

The power of making good personal and household carbon choices was affirmed by the wider church in [Resolution C008](#). This resolution affirmed sustainislandhome.org as a web-based carbon tracking tool that "... has been designed to allow individual Episcopalians to make healthy life choices that support a sustainable life. The stakes for successfully accomplishing this work are particularly high for Native Peoples, members of subsistence cultures, and communities of the poor."

Viewed another way, sustainislandhome.org can be seen as a 21st century spiritual practice – a way of living into our Baptismal Covenant wherein we respect the dignity of every human being and indeed, all of life. We can use today's technology to gain a deeper understanding of how our personal choices are impacting the climate, how we can make different choices, and how we can work together to relieve suffering.

The Sustain Island Home program is also good news! It reminds us that there are solutions, and everyone can help. The program allows us to take action as a community in an easy, quick, and impactful way. Our personal choices, added to those of friends in our congregations, will aggregate our impact and help our voices be heard. We are people of hope. We are leaders. Together, we can make a difference.

Quick Steps to sustainislandhome.org for your Congregation

It is easy to bring the Sustain Island Home program to your congregation! This Quick Guide leads you through all the steps to introduce and support the program in your congregation.

Let's get started, with Quick Steps to...

- Create your Sustain Island Home leadership team
- Introduce and launch the program
- Facilitate continued engagement and progress

We are available to help answer questions, provide trainings or attend your launch event!

Your Diocesan contact is: _____

Quick Step 1: Create your Sustain Island Home Leadership team

Congregation leadership support is important for success! Every church team is a bit different; here are a few key roles:

- Church Climate Champion:** This can be the Rector or a parishioner. This is generally the person who takes the lead in introducing the carbon tracker to the congregation and champions its use.
- Church Leadership:** Rector and Vestry. Support of both the Rector (if the Rector is not the church climate champion) and Vestry is essential to the success of the program! Support involves personally using the tracker and endorsing events that support the tracker and encourage parishioner engagement..
- Tracker Activities Coordinator:** This is the person who coordinates activities around the tracker program and acts as the liaison to the Diocesan team. This critical role includes convening the initial launch meeting, ongoing meetings, and periodic program updates. The estimated time commitment is 1.5-2 hours/week for the first month, or two and 1-1.5 hours/week ongoing. Or the role can be shared, reducing the individual time commitment. Additional details are included in the launch section below.
- Power Users:** These are parishioners who can use their experience and knowledge to help other users with questions about the site and the climate actions it recommends. This role is optional, but it is likely some parishioners will step up as you roll out the program!

The team can be small or larger; for example, the Church Climate Champion and Activities Coordinator can be the same person, or it can be a few people sharing the work. If you have questions about the best way to form your team, please reach out to your Diocesan contact listed above.

Quick Step 2. Introduce and Launch the Program

Assuming clergy and/or vestry support is in hand, the next step is to make a plan and launch the program to your congregation!

The basic steps to launching the program:

1. Decide on the **messaging and theology to use for introducing the program** to the congregation
2. **Schedule a time for a launch meeting** when ready
3. **Announce the launch meeting to the congregation**
4. **Host and facilitate the launch meeting**

1. **Messaging and theology to introduce the program**

Before holding the launch meeting, you can choose to incorporate messaging and theology in sermons, bulletin inserts, newsletters, etc. to introduce the concepts surrounding the Sustain Island Home program. This will help to create an awareness, commitment, and intention when parishioners are formally introduced to the program.

These concepts can be tied to many different times of the year, including Advent, Epiphany, Lent, and other special seasons of the church year or dedicated days, such as the Sunday when blessing of animals occurs. You can tailor these, or add others and introduce the program on a timeline that is right for your congregation.

2. **Schedule a time for a launch meeting**

When ready, schedule a time for a launch meeting for parishioners to attend and learn about the program and how to participate. This should be planned with enough notice and at a convenient time, such as Sunday coffee hour, the regular youth group night or after a weekday Eucharist or Bible study. It will be helpful to make sure the room has wifi and can support a PowerPoint presentation (projector and screen) if possible.

3. **Announce the launch meeting to the congregation**

Provide an announcement for the launch meeting through regular channels, such as the Rector's Message, bulletin inserts, congregational email, social media, and newsletters.

4. **Host and facilitate the launch meeting**

The purpose of the launch meeting is to introduce the Sustain Island Home program to the congregation and encourage participation. One of the most important ways to foster participation is to create a community around the program. Having parishioners come together and share stories about why this is important to them helps to create community and support for participation. Having them continue to come together occasionally to share their progress and talk about what they are doing creates the ongoing support and encouragement to complete the actions and make progress.

Many people are concerned about climate change, and living with those concerns can be isolating. Providing parishioners a place to come together, support each other, and work together towards solutions and a better future is empowering and can be a very positive experience.

We recommend the following sample agenda, which you can modify to meet your congregation's needs:

Launch Meeting Agenda (facilitated by the Tracker Activities Coordinator):

Opening and welcome from a Congregation Leader (Rector, etc.)

- Group introductions: Allow time for parishioners to introduce themselves in small groups of 3-4. Ask them to share why the issue of climate change is important to them. If you have a small group of up to 8-10 people, you can do this as a group. Ask them to keep their introductions to 1-2 minutes. This will take a bit of time, but it is very important to creating the community and support that will sustain the program and encourage successful participation. It is important to create a safe space where there is no wrong answer and everyone is supported and heard.
- What is the Sustain Island Home program and why is it important?
 - Presentation of PowerPoint or video provided
 - Or talk by Congregation Leader or Church Climate Champion
- How does the Sustain Island Home program work?
 - Demo of site or showing of video provided
 - Steps for users signing up including how to complete their Energy Profile (utility account login information, etc.)
- Sign up! Ask parishioners to take out their cell phones and sign up for the program. Tell parishioners that the next step after the meeting is to complete their energy profile and choose some actions to do.
- Questions? Answer any questions they have about the program. If there are questions you cannot answer, tell them you will touch base with your Diocesan contact and follow up with answers by email. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are available and will be updated as new questions are received.

- Set the next meeting. The next meeting should follow in 2-3 weeks (or as you decide). This follow up meeting will be specifically for people to share how their experience with the app is going, what actions they are planning to do, and whether they have any questions or need any help with completing their profile, etc.
- Close the meeting with a thank you for their participation in this important work!
We recommend having snacks or something to share at the meeting.

Quick Step 3: Facilitate continued church engagement and progress

The most important way to encourage participation and progress is through sustained, ongoing encouragement and engagement. We recommend the following meetings and activities to promote the program on an ongoing basis:

- **Regular meetings** (once a month or quarterly) for parishioners to come together and share how it is going, what they are working on, and help each other successfully complete actions.
- **Special events** – speakers, movies, etc. that are aligned with the Sustain Island Home program and Creation Care.
- **Continued messaging** on the program through sermons, newsletters, at events, etc.
- **Set Goals** (optional)
- **Tracking progress**, reporting out to the congregation, and **celebrating successes!**

I. Regular meetings

Regular meetings for parishioners to come together around the Sustain Island Home Program is the most important part of ongoing engagement. We recommend a meeting 2-3 weeks following the launch meeting and then ongoing meetings every month or quarter.

The following is a sample agenda for ongoing meetings:

Ongoing meeting agenda:

- Welcome and introductions/sharing
 - Time for parishioners to share in small groups of 5-6 how it is going, what actions they are working on or planning to work on. If they are in between actions (not working on anything that month), ask them to share a tip on an action they have completed. If you have a small group of 10 or less, do this as a group. (20-30 minutes)
 - Report out/Q&A – each group can report out any successes in their group, milestones, tips or questions. Also make sure to give time for parishioners to ask questions of the facilitator or the group. They can ask anything from questions on the site to questions on actions. For example: has anyone installed a heat pump water heater or bought an EV? How did it go?. (20-30 minutes)
 - Closing, confirming time for next meeting.
- For the first meeting after launch, we suggest flipping the agenda and doing Q&A first to help people with any questions about the energy profile or choosing actions, etc. Provide help to make sure everyone can successfully get started. Then have people break into groups to discuss and report back as time allows.
- Make meetings fun! They can be a potluck or a rotation of volunteers bringing snacks (some kind of sharing). You can integrate sustainable food options, recycling, and composting here as well.
- For ongoing meetings, you can add in fun topics. For example, pick an action to focus on and have someone from the group present the action and discuss; or someone can do a demonstration on an action or share their story with completing a particular action with the group, etc. Invite ideas from the group on other possible topics for meetings.
- Create a positive and supportive environment for meetings where everyone is included and heard.
- Welcome new members to the meetings and set up a buddy system where a new member can connect with someone who is familiar with the program and help them get started. For members less familiar with tech, consider setting up buddy system with younger parishioners to help with account set up and site use.

2. **Special events**

Consider planning special events for the congregation that support the Sustain Island Home program and Creation Care. Examples could be a speaker, a class (like a composting class), a movie, an EV ride and drive, a tree planting or other event.

3. **Continued messaging**

Continue messaging on the program by including information and updates in sermons, newsletters, flyers at events, social media posts, etc. to invite parishioners to engage and join the program and ongoing meetings.

4. **Set Goals**

After your launch meeting, if you choose, you can set goals for your congregation. Goals could include the number of participants, the number of actions committed or completed, or tons of carbon (CO₂e) reduced. You could also discuss this with the participants at ongoing meetings and get input on goals. Actions take time to complete; some are easy and can be done in a month or two, but some can take a year or two. Consider setting goals that are achievable and acknowledge parishioners when goals are met!

5. **Track and Report Progress and Celebrate Success**

You can track your congregations progress on the Sustain Island Home page: sustainislandhome.org. Let the congregation know about progress and milestones through announcements, newsletters, Sunday church bulletins, and other community media. Celebrate success! Have a special event to celebrate and/or include celebrations into ongoing program meetings. Put a poster somewhere prominent in the church where you can record progress visually, such as a graph showing the number of families participating or tons of CO₂e reduced.