



## Environmental Justice Ministry

ThePeoplesJusticeCouncil.org/  
UCC.org/

This guide offers a successful and stepwise model for you to replicate in your community. It is part of a series featuring the award-winning programs from the finalists of the American Climate Leadership Awards 2021 by ecoAmerica.

### PURPOSE

The Environmental Justice Ministry of the UCC is rooted in the birth of the environmental justice movement itself when frontline UCC leaders addressed environmental racism in the 1980s. This heritage informs and inspires a particular model of partnership. Through the joint work of a black-led local organization and a predominantly white national organization, frontline communities are centered in the pursuit of justice in a way that embodies the values of inclusion and equity.

### DESCRIPTION

Over the past few years, the UCC and the PJC have worked together to lay the foundation for increased organizing to advance climate justice legislation. We began by developing effective communication tools with a monthly webinar, a newsletter, a published handbook for churches, and a nationally recognized report on toxic air pollution that was accompanied by an advocacy toolkit. These tools along with the development of a coordinated UCC climate justice network and a green church certification program have led us to a stage where we now have the capacity to organize nationwide for federal climate and environmental justice legislation.

### TARGET AUDIENCE

While all are invited to attend our webinars, our primary audience is the membership of the UCC and its 5,000 churches. Our approach is a model for other faith denominations and possibly non-faith organizations where there is a need for closer local-national partnerships to advance racial, economic, and environmental justice.



## GOALS

1. Use denominational communication tools to grow an audience for webinars, newsletters, and books. Existing denominational institutions can reach tens of thousands. (In our case, a Facebook page with 117,000 followers, a weekly digest with 36,000 subscribers, and a book distribution service that has enabled us to sell 1,300 books.)
2. Build an online community of volunteers that meets regularly for the purpose of taking action on specific pieces of climate justice legislation. Utilize faith rituals and messaging to foster and strengthen the community. Make a practice of explicitly connecting legislation to core values and deeply felt beliefs.
3. Conduct legislative advocacy trainings that not only name ethical principles that center the demands of frontline communities but also provide current examples of how to apply those principles when assessing specific pieces of legislation under consideration.

## PRIMARY COMPONENTS OR ACTIVITIES

1. Webinars that address specific bills in congress with an environmental justice lens that is attentive to frontline concerns, racial justice, and economic inequality. Panelists include frontline environmental justice leaders.
2. Newsletters that inform readers about climate justice legislation, offer links to resources, share online action alerts, promote related webinars, and announce trainings.
3. Legislative advocacy trainings for the regional jurisdictions in the denomination that offer guidance how to view legislation through the lens of one's values and how to craft faith-rooted messages.
4. An online advocacy community that meets on a regular basis to contact and influence members of congress with regard to specific pieces of legislation.
5. A denomination-wide climate justice network with designated liaisons from all the regional jurisdictions of the denomination who help shape the vision for climate justice and who serve to facilitate communication to and from their regional bodies.

THE PEOPLE'S  
MOVEMENT

## IMPACT & OUTCOMES

We continually witness the impact of our work in those empowered to advocate for systemic change in community with others. No longer are they isolated individuals who feel alone in the face of injustice. They discover others who share their calling and who can be a continual source of support. This has been particularly true during the pandemic, as many felt isolated and powerless before joining with other volunteers from across the country through online meetings in which they took specific actions. Moreover, we repeatedly observe the power of rooting one's actions in one's faith. Through the language of their faith, participants identify and articulate what fundamentally motivates and sustains them in seeking climate justice. A variety of metrics point to our success. From its inception last August, the online action group met eight times by itself and an additional four times with a partner organization. The 57 volunteers in this group sent 183,447 text messages to non-voting environmentalists in five states. Other metrics:

1. An average of 426 registrations for each monthly webinar
2. 181 green church certifications
3. 1850 newsletter subscribers
4. More than 1300 copies sold of the handbook for churches addressing the climate crisis.

## STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

1. Identify an organizational partner with shared values and vision that brings to the table gifts, contributions, and perspectives that harmonize with what your own organization offers in such a way that both organizations can do significantly more working together than separately.
2. Develop open and honest communication between organizational leaders. Treat it as the development of an authentic friendship rather than a relationship formed in a purely transactional manner (i.e., "you do this for us, and we will do this for you.")
3. Mutually create and own a project, so that both organizations are involved at the ground level. Guard against a larger organization crafting a program and then asking another smaller organization to play a pre-scripted role determined by that larger organization. In terms of racial dynamics, one does not want to create a relationship in which a larger predominantly white organization tokenizes and exploits a smaller organization led by people of color.
4. Develop a shared understanding of the systemic change needed so that the focus is on the institutions that can ultimately address the climate crisis on the scale needed. Avoid "playing around the edges," so that actions are far removed from the levers of power that can stop the dominance of the industries responsible for the present crisis.



THE PEOPLE'S  
MOVEMENT

5. Identify your audience along with the communication vehicles that match your capacity and are effective for that audience whether that means webinars, newsletters, podcasts, social media, online videos, books, etc.
6. In communications, be intentional about amplifying the voices of frontline communities that have suffered from environmental injustices. Be mindful of inclusion in terms of not only the racial and gender identity of those whose voices are being amplified, but also of the issues addressed (worker justice, colonialism, etc.) To be inclusive of diverse issues requires ongoing self-education, research, and work with existing environmental justice organizations that have greater knowledge of particular matters.
7. Create a strategy that focuses on bringing your audience together for action, so that they are not isolated advocates and activists but are instead part of a community that sustains them and instills accountability for acting.
8. In further developing and maintaining the project, maintain a communicational habit in which the partner organizations continually check-in with each other in testing ideas and approaches. When a new idea hatches, share it early and develop it together.
9. Through conversations between organizations, be willing to reconsider shared strategy and goals in light of changes in the larger landscape in which one works and the opportunities that may arise within it. For example, a five- or ten-year strategy that was created during one presidential administration may not be appropriate for the next presidential administration. Likewise, movements can burst forth that either necessitate adaptation or present new avenues for action.
10. Seek expansion of impact, not just of numbers. Numbers can lead to impact, but not always. One can raise awareness among a growing audience, but if the audience does not take action in ways that seek systemic change, the impact will largely be peripheral or secondary. Expansion of impact requires creating on-ramps to action through trainings, meetings, and communities designed with a concerted focus and purpose.

