

# **Monthly Sustainable Living Tips from First Congregational United Church of Christ, River Falls, Wisconsin**

**Developed by Members of the Mission Education Committee  
November 2017 – March 2020**

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## **March 2020**

When driving on an interstate highway, do you think 75mph is going too slow? How about 80mph? Consider this: the faster you drive over the speed limit, the worse your fuel economy gets. Experts estimate that dropping your highway speed by 10mph can save about 10% in fuel. That may not seem like much, but the average driver can save several hundred dollars in fuel over the course of a year. This also means fewer emissions and less environmental impact. Bonus tip: using cruise control can help you maintain a steady speed, which can also improve fuel economy. But let's give it a try this month—for our happiness, and for our environment.

## **February 2020**

Looking to reduce some clutter around your home and feel happier and more fulfilled? Try reducing the amount of stuff that you consume. As ambiguous as it sounds, experts claim that buying less and having less can actually make us happier and more satisfied. The more stuff we accumulate, the more we have on our mind to try to manage; almost like a “burden of ownership.”

Reduced consumption begins with making a conscious effort to buy less. Ask yourself, do I really need this latest product? Or is my current one good enough? Can my old product be repaired? Is this an impulse purchase? Can I do without it? In a society where we are constantly encouraged to buy more, it can be difficult to ask ourselves these questions. But let's give it a try this month—for our happiness, and for our environment.

## **January 2020**

Start off the new year with a low-salt diet! De-icing salt, that is. De-icing salt can quickly melt snow and ice from our driveways and sidewalks, making them much safer. However, too much salt can be harmful to water quality. When excess salt is washed away in the spring, the dissolved chloride can degrade water quality in rivers, lakes and groundwater. When applying salt, only use as much as you need. More is not always better! Experts say

that one granule of salt every three inches is adequate. Salt only works down to about 10-15 degrees, so colder temperatures may require alternative measures (like sand). Precise and attentive salt application can help protect water quality and help us live more sustainably.

### **December 2019**

With the holiday season comes the season of gift giving and receiving. This year, consider making your gift exchange events more sustainable by recycling wrapping paper and packaging materials. Most non-glitter, non-foil wrapping paper can be recycled with everyday paper products (if in doubt, check with your local recycling company). Ribbons, bows, and tissue paper can be reused for gifts next year. Packing foam and peanuts can be used for shipping items later in the year, or are usually accepted at your local shipping center for re-use. And when purchasing new wrapping paper and supplies, consider selecting items that are reusable or recyclable.

### **November 2019**

The holiday season is fast approaching, and soon it will be time to decorate with holiday lights! This year, consider transitioning to LED holiday lights. They last much longer and use significantly less energy than standard incandescent lights. They run cooler and will save you money over time. Bonus: Check with your local electric utility or home improvement center for trade-in and recycling opportunities. Even switching just a few strands of lights over to LEDs is one way to live more sustainably.

### **October 2019**

If you are lucky enough (or unlucky enough, depending on the day) to work in an office setting, there are a few things that you can do to make your time at work more sustainable. Turning off your computer, lights, and other desktop electronics every night can save a lot of energy. Also, before printing a document, ask yourself if you really need a paper copy. Recycle paper documents whenever possible. Lastly, if you have the space, a potted plant can really change the atmosphere of your work area—it will produce some fresh air and bring a touch of nature into your work life.

### **September 2019**

Do you have old household chemicals or prescriptions that you're not sure what to do with? Many of these items could be harmful to our health and to the environment if not properly recycled or disposed of. Check with your local recycling authority for information on recycling these hazardous items.

### **August 2019**

August brings gentle summer breezes, warm temperatures, and fresh air... sounds like now is a great time to consider installing and using a clothesline to dry our laundry! Using a clothesline can save a lot of energy, which ultimately reduces our environmental impact and saves us money. And there are many modern styles to choose from (fixed, retractable, drying racks, etc.). Making this small change to our laundry routine (even just part of the time) is a win-win on many levels, and can help us to live more sustainable lives.

### **July 2019**

In the summer months as we especially enjoy the blessings of refrigeration, we can also follow some simple tips to conserve electrical energy:

- Allow hot food left-overs to cool before putting them in the fridge.
- Instead of leaning on the open refrigerator door deciding what we want to eat we're probably all guilty of this), keep an updated list of snacks and drinks posted on the fridge door and decide what you're craving before going in.
- A full freezer does not have to work as hard as one that is half empty. Fill plastic jugs with water and freeze them to fill up the empty space (plus you can use the frozen jugs in a cooler instead of buying ice.
- By periodically cleaning the coils on the back or bottom of your fridge, ridding them of dust bunnies that may have formed, your fridge will not have to work harder than need be. A vacuum and long handled slender brush work great for this.

### **June 2019**

Sunscreen is commonly used for our outdoor summer activities and fun. But some sunscreen products contain chemical additives that can be harmful not only for you, but also for our environment. When sunscreen washes off in our lakes and rivers, it can be harmful to marine life, and especially to coral reefs in our oceans. It is estimated that up to 14,000 tons of sunscreen is deposited in the world's oceans every year. When wondering what sunscreen is safest to use, it would be wise to consult your physician or local pharmacist. You can also search for helpful information online. Even with sunscreen, studies have shown that skin damage or the risk for skin cancer can still occur. Therefore, use common sense and stay in the shade as much as possible, wear a cap or wide-brimmed hat, cover your skin with light clothing, make use of patio and beach umbrellas, and take advantage of our wonderful shade trees.

### **May 2019**

The awaited season of planting vegetable and flower gardens has arrived. As environmental stewards we are encouraged to make use of a free, natural resource for watering—the rainwater that runs off our roof. Consider acquiring a rain barrel, or using some other containers you may have, to collect the water coming through the downspouts. Using stored rain water cuts down on the use and expense of using municipal water, and

will cause vegetables and flowers to flourish in a natural and healthy way. You may find helpful resources online, or in gardening books, or from a local gardening club. Wishing a season of happy gardening to all!

### **April 2019**

The next time you eat a meal, consider this: scientists estimate that one out of every three bites of food we eat exists because of animal pollinators. Pollinators include bees, butterflies, other insects, birds, and bats, among others. When they spread pollen from flower to flower, the flowers produce seeds, fruits, and other products that we consume on a daily basis (including chocolate!). Here are a few ways you can help our pollinator populations:

- Reduce or eliminate your use of pesticides, especially neonicotinoids. Source your plants and seeds from a neonicotinoid-free nursery.
- Leave some habitat. An un-mowed corner of your yard with some trees, tall grass, dead leaves, and wood will provide shelter, food, and nesting areas.
- Plant a variety of native grasses and flowers. Aim for a mix that flowers all year long.

### **March 2019**

Is it time for a new car? Getting behind the wheel of a new (or pre-owned) car can be a fun experience. If you will be car shopping soon, consider getting a more fuel-efficient, hybrid, or electric model. Automotive technology and efficiency keeps improving, and is more accessible to consumers than ever before. Vehicles are a large source of our greenhouse gas emissions (and other pollutants), so selecting an efficient car can have a big impact on our environment. Plus it will save you money at the gas pump time and time again.

### **February 2019**

Approximately 180 million cards are exchanged on Valentine's Day. Consider sending e-cards instead of buying paper cards for your significant other, and for other loved ones and friends. Or you may creatively make your own cards from materials you may have on hand, such as old magazines and calendars. You can do the same for other holidays and special occasions. Our fragile eco-system will benefit by the trees that will be saved. It seems like a small effort, but it is one more way you can exercise being a good steward of our environment.

### **January 2019**

Now days a large segment of our population buys drinking water in plastic bottles. Experts tell us that bottled water is no cleaner, or safer, or healthier than municipal tap

water. In the interest of reducing the negative impact of plastics upon our environment, why not make the change back to environmentally friendly and safe tap water instead. Save a number of the plastic bottles you purchase. By keeping them properly cleaned, they can be re-filled with tap water and re-used many times before disposing of them for recycling. Furthermore, the money you save will begin to count up over a period of time.

### **December 2018**

This holiday season is a great time to consider switching to cloth or linen napkins at your dinner table. Cloth napkins create less waste than paper napkins and can be reused hundreds of times. And they add a little elegance to even the simplest of meals! They can also be used several times in between washings (if not too dirty). To help with the transition, place paper napkins and towels out of sight, and select a central, convenient location to store the cloth napkins.

### **November 2018**

Do you find yourself dreading another winter of cold air drafts in your home or business? Consider having a home energy audit (or assessment) done. Home energy audits can identify the parts of your home or business that use the most energy, and identify specific steps you can take to make your building more comfortable, efficient, and save you money. Audits that use a blower door test and/or an infrared camera are the most useful for identifying areas that need more air sealing or insulation. The results may surprise you! And many electric utilities offer significant discounts or reimbursements for having an audit performed. Check with your utility provider for more information.

### **October 2018**

With cooler fall temperatures arriving, it might be time to add some air to your vehicle's tires. Tire pressure drops as the outside air temperatures drops; tires that were properly inflated in the summer may now be under-inflated, causing reduced fuel economy. Your local auto repair shop can add air for you; or if you prefer to do it yourself, many gas stations have air available for you to use. Just be sure to refer to your vehicle's owner's manual for the proper inflation pressure. Properly inflated tires can improve handling and safety, extend tire life, and increase fuel economy.

### **September 2018**

Water is essential to all of life. There are simple, practical ways that we can be responsible stewards of this precious commodity, such as taking a shorter shower, or turning off the water while we brush our teeth. Another way is to save water you are running from your kitchen sink or bathroom faucet while waiting for the hot water. The water saved can be used for watering your plants and other purposes.

## **August 2018**

As you grow your lawn and care for it, consider using natural fertilizers or compost instead of commercial fertilizer. They release nutrients slowly throughout the year and support insects, fungi, and other organisms which are essential to healthy soil. Also consider leaving grass clippings on the lawn as they provide a natural and free source of nutrients. Or you can compost the grass clippings for use in your garden.

## **July 2018**

Butterflies and bees are pollinators that do extremely important work in sustaining our food chain and adding to the beauty of nature. Climate change, pesticides, and loss of habitat are major threats to our beloved bees and butterflies, and more. What could we do to help these pollinators and enjoy their beauty? Let part of our lawn grow wild with plants that attract and nourish pollinators. In our flower beds, check out what plants and flowers will attract and be beneficial to them. You can find good information on the internet, or talk with native plant experts, or the DNR. Avoid pesticides which are harmful to pollinators. If we all do our part, the benefits will be enjoyed by God's children, and by our pollinator friends without whom we could not survive.

## **June 2018**

Do you really need a plastic straw when ordering a beverage in a restaurant? Or for your glass of water? Did you know that over 500 million plastic straws are used each day in the U.S. alone? Research shows plastic straws to be in the top 10 list of things that are harmful to our oceans and detrimental to sea life. Plastic straws are not recycled. They are used for minutes at best, and tossed away into our environment where they will outlive us all and generations to come. There is a growing movement in which people are saying "no" to plastic straws. You and your family can be a part of that movement. Whenever ordering a drink, politely request "No straw please." It seems like a small thing, but in the long run it will make our planet cleaner and healthier for all.

## **May 2018**

This time of year, many of us spend more time outdoors enjoying the nice weather. On your next walk through the neighborhood, consider bringing a few plastic bags with you to collect any trash that accumulated over the winter. Its a simple activity that the whole family can participate in, and it will make your neighborhood much more inviting to come home to. Cleaning up even just a few pieces of litter can make a big difference.

## **April 2018**

In observance of Earth Day on Sunday, April 22, native tree seedlings will be made available to our congregation and Sunday School. A "Care of The Earth" theme will be

used in Sunday School that day and each child will receive a seedling. Also, after each service, a seedling will be available to congregation members who would like one. This project has been launched by the Mission Education Committee as a reminder that we are all called to be stewards and care-takers of God's creation. Trees beautify the environment in which we live, and provide shade and shelter. They clean the air and provide oxygen. They help prevent soil erosion and can conserve energy. And besides all that, it is simply fun to watch them grow year by year. Be thinking about where you might plant a tree seedling and take one with you on April 22nd.

### **March 2018**

As Spring slowly rolls in, so will lawn and garden season. Before applying fertilizer or other products to your lawn or garden this year, consider testing the soil first to check the basic nutrient levels. Many lawn care companies do this as a service, or you can collect a sample yourself and send it in to a soils laboratory. Contact your local UW-Extension office (in Wisconsin) for a sampling kit or for more information. The test results may surprise you; your lawn may not need any fertilizer or other products at all. If you do apply products, seek out only the products that your soil test recommends, and try to keep them within the bounds of your lawn. Fertilizer and other products inadvertently applied to concrete or asphalt surfaces can be washed away into the nearest lake or stream when it rains, negatively affecting water quality.

### **February 2018**

Paper or Plastic? Like most of us, you've probably accumulated a number of cloth or canvas tote bags over the years. Put these reusable bags to work in helping the environment! Bring them with you the next time you go to a grocery store, farmers market, or home retailer. It may take a few tries to remember them, but once you make the switch from traditional single-use paper or plastic, you'll be glad you did. Some retailers even offer a small credit (\$0.05 or more) for each reusable bag you use. Bonus tip: Storing the empty bags in your car is a way to make sure you won't forget them at home.

### **January 2018**

Looking for an easy New Year's resolution? This year, consider losing some kilowatt hours by replacing the most commonly-used light bulbs in your home with more energy efficient LED light bulbs. LED bulbs use a fraction of the energy of standard incandescent light bulbs, and come in all kinds of shapes, colors, and sizes. They light up quicker and often have a better light quality than compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs). And most LED bulbs last 10 years or longer, and are now priced very competitively. Reducing energy use is a great goal to set for 2018, and energy efficient LED lighting is an easy place to start.

**December 2017**

With the holiday season comes the season of gift giving and receiving. This year, consider making your gift exchange events more sustainable by recycling wrapping paper and packaging materials. Most non-glitter, non-foil wrapping paper can be recycled with everyday paper products (if in doubt, check with your local recycling company). Ribbons, bows, and tissue paper can be reused for gifts next year. Packing foam and peanuts can be reused for shipping items later in the year, or are usually accepted at your local shipping center for re-use. And when purchasing new wrapping paper and supplies, consider selecting items that are reusable or recyclable.

**November 2017**

Tired of getting junk mail? It frequently fills our mailboxes and can be a big waste of paper and other resources. Consider calling the companies and organizations that send it and (politely) ask to be removed from their mailing list. It only takes a few minutes and they are usually happy to help. This is also a good opportunity to switch to electronic or paperless billing for many of your monthly bills and account statements. Less junk mail is a great way to conserve resources and live more sustainably.