

YANKTON FIRST UMC'S GREEN TEAM MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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By: Doreen Gosmire, director of communications, Dakotas UMC



"It is important that we take care of our earth for ourselves, for the future of our youth and children." These are the words of Dan Johnson, a lay leader from [First United Methodist Church in Yankton, South Dakota](#), who attended the annual conference and left inspired to start a Green Team.

The 2023 Dakotas Annual Conference members approved Legislative item 1.2: Resolution to create Green Teams for climate justice, energy conservation, and creation care. The legislation encourages every local church in the Dakotas Annual Conference to create a Green Team or strengthen an existing one for action in four areas each year—worship, education, practice, and advocacy—providing children, youth, and adults of all ages with inspiration, knowledge, encouragement, and practical means for caring for creation and justice.

"Pastor Marty [Toepke-Floyd] from Jamestown had set up a table about Green Teams within The United Methodist Church. I had never heard of that," said Dan. "During the meeting, they gave a shout-out towards it. I leaned over to Pastor Katie [Ricke] and said, we should do this. We did it."

Dan put an announcement in the weekly and monthly newsletters. "I invited any people who would like to join me and work towards establishing a Green Team. In no time, there were a half dozen people in the church that said, 'This is important to us too.'"

Rev. Katie Ricke, First UMC, supports the team in any way she can. "I give Dan 100 percent of the credit for making this happen. I do whatever I can to support the team. I make sure things get in our

newsletters and on the screens at worship. There really wasn't a blueprint for us. The team started meeting and brainstorming, and things took off."

The group met and brainstormed ideas. One member had a spouse who was a member of First UMC's Board of Trustees. She shared that the Trustees found several places in the church building that were under-insulated.

"These areas were drafty and cold," explained Dan. The choir would complain about how cold it was up at the front of the sanctuary on cold winter days. Where the soundboard people were, it was drafty and cold. It was because there were really large, cement block walls up in the attic that were totally uninsulated."

[The Green Team's](#) first project was to insulate those areas. They donated funds, bought materials, and installed the insulation.

"It was completed in three work sessions. People volunteered, donating their time and tools. You could immediately tell the space was getting toastier," said Dan. It was really a success. It is a tangible accomplishment that helps with our heating costs and makes it more comfortable in the front of the church."



The next project was installing insulation on some single-pane windows. Some single-pane stained glass windows were not visible to anyone, so the Green Team worked with the trustees to install sheet insulation.

The team recognized that a lot of Styrofoam and plastic would be utilized at different events.

Dan explains, "The youth group usually has a meal served to them on Wednesday nights. Instead of just pitching a bunch of 60 Styrofoam cups every week, we decided that we would all pitch in and buy reusable, good-quality plastic cups that we

could run through our dishwasher. We are trying to get away from buying plastic and Styrofoam. We want to encourage basic good practices. We have been trying to live greener lives as individuals and a community."

There is power in numbers. "The green team concept in a church is trying to get other people to embrace this different way of doing things that's better for our planet and to help mitigate climate change," Dan said.

One way the team is inviting people to be green is by sharing factoids. At the beginning of worship services, there are usually scrolling announcements. The team has crafted green messages. For example, when you recycle an aluminum can, it saves enough energy in the manufacturing process of aluminum, to power your television for three hours.

"They are just little factoids to keep in mind. They raise our consciousness. Things like how much better it is to have LED lighting in your house, how important it is to have energy-star appliances, how helpful it is to get programmable thermostats, lower your temperature a few degrees in the winter, and wear sweaters—just little reminders that people might want to embrace," shares Dan.

First UMC's Green Team meets once a month on Zoom. "We didn't really need to meet in person. We all know each other and can share our ideas easily via Zoom. So that made it kind of easy to coordinate," Dan said. We talk about actionable items, and certain people have specific interests, and they run with their ideas.

Earth Day is coming up. The team hopes to get that in front of the congregation. Spring also provides an opportunity to think about the outdoors.

Pastor Katie shares, "I know that team has been brainstorming about outdoor spaces. They are looking at parts of our grounds that are unusable. We have to pay to mow those areas. What would it look like to put native plants and pollinators in those areas to be bee-friendly?"

Dan shares the hope that Green Team efforts will continue to flourish.

"We have a good group of people. Everybody pitches in and does stuff. There are real hopes that it will keep growing and more people will become excited about it in our community in the Dakotas Conference," he said.