

# VERMONT: Diocese receives EPA Environmental Merit Award

By Anne Clarke Brown, April 23, 2010

[Diocese of Vermont] Members of the Diocese of Vermont's [Earth Stewards Committee](#) accepted an [Environmental Merit Award](#) from the New England Office of the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#) at a ceremony at Boston's Faneuil Hall on the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, April 22.

The annual EPA awards recognize "outstanding environmental advocates who have made significant contributions toward preserving and protecting our natural resources," according to a letter from Curtis Spaulding, director of the EPA's New England Office.

A 2007 diocesan convention resolution required congregations to conduct energy audits, develop implementation plans for addressing energy inefficiencies, and to report the results to the 2009 diocesan convention. Bishop Thomas Ely appointed an environment committee -- now the Earth Stewards Committee -- to assist congregations in meeting these requirements. The group uses its page on the diocesan [website](#) to share results of congregational efforts, as well as resources.

The diocese's church buildings are typically more than 50 years old and are either stone or wood frame with little to no insulation. [Vermont Interfaith Power and Light](#) estimated that energy consumption could be reduced by 15-20 percent in churches where opportunities identified in the energy audits are implemented.

"Winning this award is very exciting for us, as it pays tribute to the teamwork of the Earth Stewards Committee that has been built on a 'green' foundation in the Diocese of Vermont," said the Rev. Anita Schell-Lambert, Earth Stewards Committee chair. "This foundation is seen in environmental resolutions over the past few years that underscore our commitment to live more simply and to decrease our carbon footprint one vital step at a time."

According to the award nomination, the committee has expanded its purpose to "widen the diocese's knowledge of energy efficiency, climate change, greenhouse gas emissions, and the links between good environmental stewardship and the reduction of poverty."

From the outset, the Earth Stewards Committee has taken a three-pronged approach of spiritual practice, study, and action to, in the words of its mission statement, "foster awareness and deepen understanding of our lives as stewards of God's creation, and to practice environmental responsibility and sustainability."

The nomination said that Ely "determined that environmental considerations will be built into every major diocesan decision. In support of that, the diocese is pursuing statewide reductions in parish use of bottled water and paper products, and strongly encouraging the use of locally produced food for major events. Further, the diocese is seeking support for a solar farm on its campus."

Frances Huessy, a member of the Earth Stewards Committee from Essex Junction, said, "This award is not an end-point to the work that we have done, but rather an affirmation of something we started. We will have to continue to re-create ourselves so that we can do more. Fortunately, this is not a hard thing to do in the Episcopal Church or in this diocese."

The Rev. Elizabeth Hilgartner of Norwich, also a committee member, echoed Huessy's sense of affirmation. "It may be that the stewardship of the fragile ecosystem that sustains all of us is the most critical issue of our time, and it's our task here in the diocese to facilitate creative, innovative, and effective responses to the challenge among the parishes and people of the diocese," she said. "If we're faithful in this ministry, perhaps we'll be able to inspire the wider community, and even (with God's help) the world."

Bob Wertz, a committee member from Brandon, said that his involvement with the Earth Stewards Committee "has shown me is how concrete my walk of faith can be -- indeed must be - - to join the forces that see a sustainable lifestyle as our only hope."

-- Anne Clarke Brown is communication minister for the Diocese of Vermont.