



FAITH FOR EARTH

A photograph of a forest with sunlight streaming through the trees, creating a warm and serene atmosphere. The sun is positioned in the upper left, casting long shadows and creating a lens flare effect. The trees are tall and thin, and the ground is covered in green moss and fallen leaves.

# Guidelines on Green Houses of Worship

## Introduction

The building sector alone is responsible for 40% of the annual energy consumption and nearly 30% of all energy-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emission<sup>1</sup>. Buildings in general do not only consume energy, but also water, produce wastewater and solid waste as well as one of the main reasons for mining sand, quarries and other extractives.

The concept of green buildings is as old as the first building was constructed. Traditionally, home owners wanted to have the best aeration system for their dwellings, the best natural light and a small plot of land to grow their own food needs. In recent history, due to the negative impact of urbanization on the environment, the concept of green buildings has been developed to encourage home owners to integrate some design elements to minimize the impact on the environment and use construction

materials, fixtures and other resources that reduce negative impacts and create positive ones on our climate and natural environment.

A House of Worship is a building or a structure especially constructed or converted into a place where individuals or a group of people perform religious rituals of devotion. Such houses of worship can occupy a land as small as few meters to structure and facilities that expand for thousands of acres. Temples, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques are examples of such structures. Throughout history, these houses of worship were among the first buildings to be constructed in a human settlement.

There have been some attempts to count how many houses of worship for each of the religions currently exist, but no credible study could give precise numbers. Some resources indicate that there are around 37 million churches, 4 million mosques, 20 thousand synagogues and hundreds of millions of temples<sup>2</sup>. But, with no doubt

they are in the dozens of millions. These houses of worship can become minarets of sustainability and examples of how religious beliefs demonstrate the concept of stewardship and human responsibility towards the environment, in the same symbol of the religion, i.e. the house of worship.



Image by [Dimitris Vetsikas](#) from [Pixybay](#)

It is for this reason; this publication has been developed to showcase some successful examples from religions around the world on their greening efforts of their houses of worship and provide some useful references and tips to build or transform a

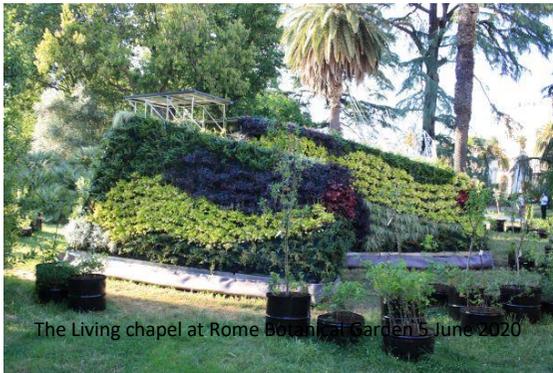
<sup>1</sup> UNEP sustainable Building and Climate Initiative

<sup>2</sup> UNEP's Faith for Earth Foresight Brief 008.

house of worship to be green and contribute to achieving sustainability.

## The Living Chapel and Living Sacred Spaces

Inspired by the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Pope Francis's landmark environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, a global team of architects, artists and musicians have created a Living Chapel as a place of serene harmony between nature, humanity, and God. The Living Chapel was launched on the world Environment Day on 5th June 2020 at the Rome Botanical Garden<sup>3</sup>.



The mission is to unite all faiths around the value of care for our common home by inspiring, educating, and equipping all people to live and act in harmony with the natural world. The Living Chapel was made a reality by joining many important partners such as the Dicastery For Integral Human Development of the Vatican, FAO, UNEP, and many others. The initiative was founded by Julian Darius Revie Founder and Creative Director.

The Faith for Earth Initiative is discussing with the partners, and others interested, the launch of the Living Sacred Spaces Initiative. The initiative will encourage Houses of Worship to integrate a holistic approach in greening its buildings and integrate the following elements:

- 1- Planting trees in the premises of the sacred space and by the sacred space in the community.
- 2- Become a nursery to distribute to locals with a hired plantation expert - generating income for locals— or enhancing the skills of the guardian of the sacred space.

- 3- Ensure energy efficiency of the buildings including solar supply of energy, to the sacred space and the neighboring community. Retrofitting to reduce energy loss in existing buildings.
- 4- Ensure water efficient space, with water recycling by using grey water for the trees and use water efficient faucets.
- 5- Establish organic farms within the premises of the living space as much as the space can handle, including roof top gardening and vertical gardening.
- 6- Solid waste management system in place, recycling and reuse of recyclable materials.
- 7- Encourage green preaches – On holidays, Sunday, Fridays, etc.
- 8- Promote green faith celebrations such as green Ramadan, Green Christmas, etc.
- 9- Provision of a space for interfaith activities/worship.

<sup>3</sup> <https://livingchapel.com/>

## What is Green House of Worship?

All faiths teach to revere and take good care of nature and the environment. Houses of worship, churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, etc., often serve as the spiritual centre for communities. When these focal sites preach about sustainability, believers will learn to become increasingly environmentally conscious in their daily lives. Therefore, the work done in and around the houses of worship will have great influence.



A mosque in Istanbul Copyright [Pixybay](#)

To build up green houses of worship is to have religious sites engage in eco-friendly practices of worship, sustainably design and construct buildings, and most impactfully, to act as a centre of sustainable lifestyles and teachings within communities. The engagement on green issues is a journey that unfolds gradually. What you can do depends on where you are starting from.



Ginkaku ji Temple copyright by [Pixybay](#)

## Where to Start?



Rooftop of Annunciation Byzantine Catholic Church, photo from [its website](#)



- 1) Host a roundtable of all interested partners/ congregants/ worshippers to discuss about the need to implement sustainable practices, why it is important, and what it means to be a green house of worship. Form a “Green Committee” with dedicated members.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> ARC. 2015. [Green Temples Guide](#).

- 2) If possible, conduct an environmental **assessment** of the house of worship. This can give a better idea of what the house of worship is already doing positively and which significant environmental issues can be tackled later.
- 3) Discuss and communicate with other practitioners that have implemented similar programmes. Think of related organisations you can partner with and learn together.
- 4) Propose realistic measures and opt for better ecological practices in the house of worship. A **strategic plan** will vary on several factors including size, budget, number of worshippers, geographic location, etc.
- 5) Start a fund or trust to financing improving the sustainability of your house of worship.



Photo from [Temple Israel of Boston](#)

The Green Team of **Temple Israel of Boston** took in charge of reducing the carbon footprint, educating the congregation about environmental responsibility, and facilitating the communication with communities and professional agencies. It consists of a group of congregants, clergy and staff.

#### **Umbrella organization/ Initiatives on Green Houses of Worship:**

- [Eco-Temple Community Development Project](#) (Buddhism)
- [Green Churches Network – Canada](#) (Christianity)
- [Green the Church](#) (Christianity)

- [The Green Church Initiative](#) (Christianity)
- [Church of England – Shrinking the Footprint](#) (Anglican)
- [Eco-Church](#) (Christianity)
- [Eglise Verte](#) (Christianity)
- [Daoism Ecological Temple Network](#) (Daoism)
- [Green Ramadan Initiative](#) – ISNA (Islam)
- [Green Mosques Initiative](#) – Morocco (Islam)
- [Environmentally Friendly Mosque Initiative](#) – Environmental Green Horizons Society (Islam)
- [Green Mosques in Jordan](#) (Islam)
- [Indonesia Council of Ulema Green Mosque Initiative](#) (Islam)
- [Green Gurdawa](#) – Eco-Sikh (Sikhism)
- [Green Temples Guide](#) (Interreligious)
- [Interreligious Eco-Justice Network](#) (Interreligious)

See the sources and specific guides on established strategies and examples of religious practices and green buildings in the next two sections. However, there is no single applicable blueprint and we encourage people to be creative and work within their specific contexts.

## Toolkits for Eco-friendly Religious Practices

Perhaps you are currently unable to “green” your religious facilities for various reasons. However, having sustainable lifestyles pervade in religious sites and communities is a milestone for greening the house of worship as well. There are many ways to raise awareness and offer tips to your members through religious practices. There are other ways the house of worship can become the focal point for environmental engagement of communities.

### Green Worship

- 1) Include the importance of sustainable living in regular sermons or preaches. Disseminate statements, add prayers, take meditations, or sing hymns about caring for nature. Draw inspiration from religious texts.
- 2) Organise congregations and celebrations on environmental themes and on special days such as Earth Day, World Environment Day, World Car Free Day, *etc.* Organized activities can be cleaning up parks, car-free Sunday, tree-planting, spiritual outings, *etc.*
- 3) Make sure all your worship and gathering activities are low-noise, low-pollution, and low-emission. For instance, encourage people to walk or cycle to worship, save water during ablution, *etc.*
- 4) If you are considering constructing a novel house of worship, why not try a ‘spiritual forest church’ or alike? Get creative!



Photo from [Pixabay](#)

**EcoMENA** provides tips for a Green Ramadan to Muslims: reduce food waste, save water during making ‘Wudu’, reject disposable cutlery and so forth.

**Pleasley Forest Church** nestles within the ancient boundaries of Sherwood Forest, Mansfield. There is no building, for nature is the cathedral, the sky and stars its rafters, the grass its floor and the trees its pillars. People meet to have spiritual senses awakened by connecting with nature in the worship of the Creator.



Pleasley Forest Church, photo from [its website](#)

**Longshan Temple** reduces the use of incense and find more eco-friendly alternatives for traditional incense.

### ✚ Education & Awareness Raising

- 1) Prepare educational materials including signs, leaflets, posters and newsletters for devotees.
- 2) Establish and support programmes to train religious teachers, future religious leaders and general followers on sustainability.

- 3) Involve religious-affiliated schools with more environmental education in the curriculum.
- 4) Start a 'green group' in a house of worship which leads worship, carries out green actions, holds workshops on sustainable lifestyle, and perhaps even writes green articles for publications.

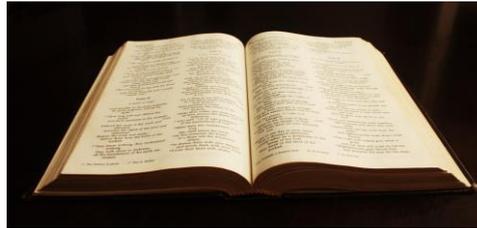


Photo from [Pixabay](#)

**St. Joseph's Senior Secondary School**, a Catholic mission school, gets engaged in [Sandwatch Project](#) by UNESCO, which seeks to develop awareness of the fragile nature of the marine and coastal environment and the need to use it wisely.



Photo from [UNESCO](#)



Photo from [TMO](#)

**River Oaks Islam Center** in Houston delegates a 'green team' to grow individual efforts for making a sustainable difference in their communities. They remind congregants of the Islamic imperative to act as stewards of the earth and to take care of all of God's creatures.

An ecology programme led by the **Protestant Church of South India** (C.S.I.) is reaching teachers, clergy, students and children with education about leading healthy lives, sustainable agriculture, climate change mitigation and energy saving. With more than 4.3 million members, the C.S.I. has placed ecological concerns as a key part of its constitution and mission and runs a programme to transform behaviour and systems through engaging, learner-led education. This has begun by establishing a committee for ecological concerns since 1992.



Photo from [UNESCO](#)

✚ Campaign

- 2) Organize or facilitate the cooperation on environmental affairs among different faith-based organizations and secular sectors, environmental initiatives or projects included.
- 3) Vigorously engage in environmental management, together with civil society and governments. Voice your perspective as representatives of a religious view in these debates.



Photo from [Pixabay](#)



Faith for Earth Dialogue in UNEA 4, photo from [UNEP](#).

**B'nai Jeshurun**, a synagogue in New York, actively participates in different environment campaigns.

- As a part of **Sustainability Pilot Program by Hazon**, the project has included LED lighting upgrade, planters for the rooftop, switching to fully compostable plates and cups, etc.
- They also encourage composting and recycling at Kiddush as an outcome of the **Green Kiddush**

预览已结束，完整报告链接和二维码如下：

[https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5\\_13840](https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_13840)

