DEFINING OUR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Introduction
My name is Susan Davis. I am one of the members of Jason’s sustainability team. My
church has been purchasing “green” power through the Massachusetts Interfaith Power
and Light (MIPL) organization.1 This non-profit initiative offers Massachusetts
congregations of every religious tradition a comprehensive means of reducing energy
consumption, lowering operating costs and promoting renewable energy in houses of
worship. My fellow team members were not familiar with this program. I explained it to
them at our first committee meeting.

There was great concern that houses of worship leave a relatively large environmental
footprint. Although most congregations recognize the moral imperative for stewardship,
they do not always stand on the moral “high ground” when it comes to actual energy
usage. The MIPL initiative seeks to get its members to become better stewards and, in
the process, encourage and inspire their congregants to do better at home, school and at
work.

The Cambridge churches that belong to the MIPL effort include the following:

Christ Church
Episcopal Divinity School
First Parish Unitarian Universalist
Friends Meeting (Quaker)
St. James Episcopal Church
St. Paul’s Parish

The MIPL program is called “GreenUp.”2 Here is a quote from their brochure:

“The community of faith has always led in the great movements for justice. We
led in the abolition of slavery. We led in the movement for women’s rights. We
led in the struggle for civil rights, and we continue to lead in the effort to remove
the curse of racism from this land. Now it is time for us to respect the dignity of
every human being and all life on earth.

It is time to practice what we preach and to show forth not only with out lips, but
also with our lives. It is time for the community of faith to practice energy

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1 Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light, http://www.mipandl.org/

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conservation, invest in energy efficiency, and thus save more than enough money to afford cleaner sources of renewable energy.

This is not just a ministry for the environment, but also a ministry of love and justice for all our neighbors across town, around the world, and our intergenerational neighbors – our children – for years to come. The community of faith has an historic opportunity to lead the way.”

MIPL wants members to sign up for renewable resources by enrolling in “GreenerWatts New England.” They also want individuals to sign up for greener energy options for their homes. The way this works is that when you enroll in GreenUp, you continue to receive the same high quality dependable electricity from your electric company. The difference is that 100% of your electric needs are matched with purchases of renewable resources for use in the New England power pool. You are helping to create a cleaner renewable, locally produced pool of energy resources here in New England. Your investment helps move away from conventional sources of electricity like coal, oil, gas, and nuclear power, toward electricity generated from sun, wind, earth and water.

MIPL is also providing its member congregations with energy audits and suggestions for making their place of worship more energy efficient through a not-for-profit group known as Conservation Services Group.

This faith-based effort has been also established in other parts of the country. The District of Columbia Energy Office has published the “Green Faith Guide.” This excellent guide provides many ideas as to why protecting the earth is so important to people of faith.

However, there are many other aspects of social responsibility that are a part of the faith movement. The International City/County Management Association has published a paper entitled, “Active Living and Social Equity: Creating Healthy Communities for All Residents.” This important document will help you understand how the faith community and the City of Cambridge could work together to enhance social responsibility and use this partnership to address environmental responsibility and economic responsibility at the same time.

**Our Social Agenda**

Charles River Printing has a diverse group of employees in our employee-owned company. The sustainability committee decided that every employee would be offered an opportunity to introduce their house of worship to the program. The company will print information on the greenhouse gas reduction movement both for the employees who

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4 Conservation Services Group, [http://www.csgrp.com/services/renewable/greenerwatts.html](http://www.csgrp.com/services/renewable/greenerwatts.html)

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wish to take the information and for the houses of worship to use if they seek to take action on this program with their members. A number of the local houses of worship are already customers of Charles River Printing.

Developing a demand for renewable energy sources in Eastern Massachusetts should create better air quality in the region. This would be quite desirable for the large number of people that suffer from asthma. Some of our employees’ children suffer from asthma. The fine particulates emitted from the burning of fossil fuels in electric power plants has been a major source of aggravation for their condition. Currently fossil fuel combustion accounts for about 90% of the electricity demand in Massachusetts.

This initiative will help contribute to the lowering of greenhouse gas emissions from commercial sources. Collectively the commercial sector contributed over 61% of the greenhouse gas emissions in the City of Cambridge with our heating, ventilation and air conditioning needs in 1998. Between 1999 and 2004, the amount of greenhouse gas emissions from the commercial sector increased by 39.3%. The City of Cambridge was looking for a reduction, not an increase! Our environmental initiatives do not address greenhouse gas emissions. So we will address them first by helping others to seek to lower greenhouse gas emissions as part of our social initiative.

We will challenge other businesses in the City of Cambridge to address their greenhouse gas emissions. We will talk with our suppliers and see if they have plans to convert their fleets to biodiesel fuels or hybrid technology. We will provide certificates of appreciation to those that have made the conversion and to others as they notify our purchasing agent of their conversion. Many of the members of the Printing Industries of New England are located in Eastern Massachusetts. We will challenge them to follow our lead both with the support of the MIPL and the greening of the supplier fleets.

After discussing this matter with the leadership of the company, it was decided that Charles River Printing will purchase green energy ourselves. We heard that Harvard University was doing the same by purchasing wind energy to cover part of their demand for electricity.

**Involving Employees Directly**

We understand that the Cambridge *Climate Action Plan* calls for the formation of “ecoteams” to help get individuals involved in the effort. The Committee on Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) has formed ecoteams. The First Church Unitarian Universalist and Friends Meeting have also formed ecoteams.

Cambridge is following the “Sustainable Lifestyle Program”\(^7\) developed by the Empowerment Institute. This program has more of a rural flavor, so Cambridge has tried to make it more urban in adopting it.

\(^7\) Sustainable Lifestyle Program, EcoTeams, [http://www.empowermentinstitute.net/files/SLP.html](http://www.empowermentinstitute.net/files/SLP.html)
Households consume up to one-third of the resources consumed overall in the country and indirectly use much of the rest of the resources through the purchase of products and services. It is how we live that is a big part of the problem. It can also be a big part of the solution if we adopt more environmentally sustainable lifestyles. We need to exercise our social responsibility and stewardship to ensure there will be adequate resources for our children and their children.

In this program, a household EcoTeam consists of five or six households. They meet seven times over a 4-month period and use a step-by-step workbook to create a more responsible lifestyle. Choosing from a series of practical actions, the team supports one another to reduce waste, use less water and energy, buy less harmful products and encourage others to get involved. The Empowerment Institute claims the following yearly savings from a successful EcoTeam:

- 41% - 51% less solid waste
- 25% - 34% less water used
- 9% - 17% less energy used
- 16% - 20% less fuel used for transportation
- $227 - $389 saved through more efficient use of resources.

The Northwest Earth Institute Ecology Education organization has promoted the concept of “home eco-parties.” Home Eco-Parties are an enjoyable way to examine household practices and consider alternatives that reduce impact on the earth. A host invites about ten friends to his or her home. Before arriving, each guest fills out a checklist outlining practices in his or her own home related to energy, water, solid waste and household chemical use. A trained volunteer facilitates an interactive, two-hour discussion on opportunities to make homes more earth-friendly based on the checklists. Maybe these facilitators could use brainwriting and bubble-up/bubble-down to help the people come up with their own ideas!

We plan to encourage our employees to start EcoTeams or hold Eco-Parties. We would help set a wonderful example for the other residents in the community. Maybe there could be a competition between the institutions sponsoring these EcoTeams to see how the families could beat the averages cited by the Sustainability Institute above. We’ll ask the Cambridge Chamber of Commerce to help mobilize the business community. It could be like the United Way campaign in the town. However, instead of trying to raise money for local charities, these teams would be trying to conserve resources and lower greenhouse gas emissions to protect future generations. Both programs are wonderful examples of social responsibility at work.

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9 United Way (model), http://national.unitedway.org/

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Questions to Address

1. Discuss how these initiatives would help address the social responsibilities of Charles River Printing’s sustainable development program. Do you think it is reasonable for the company to invest in these programs?

2. Based on your reading of the social responsibility narrative and your understanding of Charles River Printing, what other programs could they consider that would help address their social responsibilities?

3. How do these social responsibilities also help meet the environmental responsibilities of the company? When Charles River Printing addressed its environmental responsibilities, how did they also address the social responsibilities of the company? We are going to find out that sustainable development is all about integrating the environmental, social and economic responsibilities. This is the first look at this integration effort. It will be addressed more fully in a narrative two weeks from now.