

## S U S T A I N A B I L I T Y   D I S C U S S I O N   C O U R S E S

**Discussion Courses** provide an enjoyable, supportive setting in which to examine personal values and habits, engage in stimulating discussion, and make personal changes if desired. These courses were developed by the Northwest Earth Institute and, since 1993, over 65,000 individuals and hundreds of organizations all over the country have been involved. With support from **Madison Community Foundation**, **Sustain Dane** promotes the Northwest Earth Institute (NWEI) discussion courses throughout Dane County.

### **VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY**

This course explores the personal and environmental benefits of simplicity. Topics covered in eight sessions include: *The Meaning of Simplicity* ♦ *Living More With Less* ♦ *Your Money or Your Life* ♦ *Do You Have the Time?* ♦ *How Much Is Enough?* ♦ *Swimming Against the Tide* ♦ *The Practice of Simplicity* ♦ *Celebration*

### **HEALTHY CHILDREN HEALTHY PLANET**

This course considers ways to create meaningful family times and healthful environments for children. Topics covered in seven sessions include: *Cultural Pressures* ♦ *Family Rituals & Celebrations* ♦ *Advertising* ♦ *Food & Health* ♦ *Time & Creativity* ♦ *Technology & the Media* ♦ *Exploring Nature* ♦ *Celebration*

### **DISCOVERING A SENSE OF PLACE**

This course considers the potential benefits of knowing and protecting our place. Will a commitment to the local bioregion affect our willingness to accept responsibility to care for the earth? Topics covered in eight sessions include: *A Sense of Place* ♦ *Responsibility to Place* ♦ *Knowing Your Bioregion* ♦ *Living in Place* ♦ *Mapping Your Place* ♦ *Building Local Community* ♦ *Empowerment* ♦ *Celebration*

### **EXPLORING DEEP ECOLOGY**

Participants discuss how personal values affect the way they view and treat the earth. Topics covered in nine sessions include: *Deep Ecology* ♦ *The Gaia Hypothesis* ♦ *Spirituality and the Earth* ♦ *A New Story From Science* ♦ *Native American Wisdom* ♦ *Eco-psychology* ♦ *Simplicity* ♦ *Bioregionalism* ♦ *Celebration*

### **CHOICES FOR SUSTAINABLE LIVING**

Participants consider steps toward ecologically sustainable lifestyles, communities, and organizations. Topics covered in nine sessions include: *A Call to Sustainability* ♦ *Ecological Principles* ♦ *Sustainable Communities* ♦ *Sustainable Business and Economy* ♦ *Sustainable Food* ♦ *Sustainable Buying* ♦ *Sustainable Living* ♦ *Visions of Sustainability* ♦ *Celebration*

### **GLOBALIZATION AND ITS CRITICS**

The course explores how globalization is affecting the environment, local economics, and social and cultural customs throughout the world. Topics covered in eight sessions include: *Globalization Overview* ♦ *Questioning Free Trade* ♦ *Transnational Corporations* ♦ *Food in the Global Marketplace* ♦ *Globalization and the Environment* ♦ *Social Equity* ♦ *Shaping Opinion* ♦ *Homogenization of Cultures* ♦ *Celebration*

Courses consist of 7 to 12 people who meet weekly for about an hour to discuss readings from a course book. In centers of faith, groups usually meet after or before weekly worship. Each meeting consists of two parts: an opening and a facilitated discussion. Except for the first meeting, sessions are opened and facilitated by members of the group on a rotating basis. This structured, yet non-didactic format encourages a process which:

- \* Establishes trust, respect, and a sense of community among group members.
- \* Allows participants to seek personal clarity without group consensus.
- \* Creates a supportive environment for personal change.

Course participants address evocative questions about the topic of each discussion book chapter. These questions are included at the beginning of each chapter and are designed to help participants examine and create discussion, not consensus, around personal values and personal habits in relation to the Earth. Each week, a new volunteer facilitator from the group uses these questions to encourage meaningful discussions. Examples of questions are:

\* How would you describe your feeling of responsibility for the land in the neighborhood or the area where you live? What factors have contributed to that feeling?

\* Consider how your life would be if you lived with less. Is this idea attractive to you? Does the idea cause anxiety? Explain.

\* Can you think of a principle (ethical, ecological, etc.) that helps guide you in making decisions? What is the principle? How is it helpful?

### **Steps to Getting Started**

1. Schedule a time and reserve a space for the presentation for an introductory presentation at your home, workplace, neighborhood center or center of faith.
2. After the date and location are set, invite others to the meeting. Announcement methods can include flyers in popular locations, newsletters, and, most importantly, personal invitation. (Sustain Dane has several announcement templates available for your use.)
3. At the introductory meeting, a representative from Sustain Dane will describe the course and explain how it works. Everyone who wants to participate will sign up. The date for the first session is set based on the time availability of participants.

For more information contact Sustain Dane at 608.819.0689 or check our website at [www.sustaindane.org](http://www.sustaindane.org)

### **About Sustain Dane**

Sustain Dane is a non-profit organization committed to helping make Dane County more sustainable. Our mission is to create a community that deeply enjoys, cares for and is sustained by its unique environment. Sustain Dane takes a collaborative approach on a variety programs and projects ranging from organizing sustainable discussion groups to assisting in the development of an international sustainable community network.