

# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

## Sustainable Living Team News

### *Simplify for the Holidays*

From Nicole Lynskey

The holidays are almost upon us! There are things to love about them: our kid's excitement, seeing family, or celebrating the sacred. However, some find the season hard. And some wish for less hustle and less shopping. It is also not the planet's favorite season. According to one study, the average Christmas, with its food, gifts, travel, lights, trees, and more, creates 650 kg of carbon, the equivalent of driving 1,600 miles ([www.epa.gov](http://www.epa.gov))! Still, I am not suggesting we become perfect environmentalists. In this imperfect system, it is difficult to do. Rather, I strive for a do-better-ness.

One way to do this is to simplify our gift-giving. And yet, the season has an undeniable undertow, a pull of obligations and expectations that can draw us into more busyness and shopping than we want. Intuitively we know that "stuff" does not really create happiness (for those of us with means), though it can feel like it does. According to researcher Tim Kasser ([bit.ly/timkasser](http://bit.ly/timkasser)), this is because shopping gives our brain a dose of the happy brain chemical, dopamine. He also found that materialistic values reduce happiness: decreasing pro-social behavior and self-esteem, and increasing depression.

In his book *Happiness*, Ed Deiner discusses factors that can change our happiness set point: which includes things like forgiveness and gratitude, spending time with friends and family, art, or mastering something you enjoy. Circumstances — new cars, new toys, new jobs, marital status — may give us a temporary bump in happiness but do little to change that setpoint long-term.

So how can we simplify? Often, we need to renegotiate gift-giving with family or friends. One thing my family did to reduce gifts was to draw names both between the kids and the adults. We donate those extra funds to charity as a family. It makes for a less stressful and more meaningful holiday. I would also return us to what creates real happiness. Instead of giving a thing, give an experience to share — theater or dinner. Instead of the mad dash of shopping, have a gift-making party. Instead of buying cheap goods likely to end up in the landfill or possibly made in a factory with human rights violations, buy something local or high quality. Consider some of these ideas: <http://bit.ly/ucgiftideas>. Whatever you do, I wish you more joy in your holiday season.

Looking for more ways to help the planet? Join us for a workshop on pollinator-friendly lawns on December 4. Or be a part of the sustainability team's efforts! Email us at [unitysustainabilityteam@gmail.com](mailto:unitysustainabilityteam@gmail.com) for more information.



## Gun Sense Ministry Team Update

From Sue Conner and Joan Duke

The next Minnesota legislative session convenes on February 11, 2020. This will be another opportunity to pass the "**Big Two**" sensible gun policy bills which we, and our partner, ProtectMinnesota, would like to see become Minnesota law. The two bills are:

1. **Extreme Risk Protection Order (Red Flag)**
2. **Universal Background Check**

Both bills passed in the Minnesota House in the 2019 session, but the leader of the Senate refused to give them a hearing and never brought them for a floor vote.

In 2020, the bills will need to start again in the House Ways and Means committee before they can come for a House vote. They are in good position for passing. The real question is: what happens in the Senate? Will they get a hearing? Will they get a vote? The leaders of the Senate will still have control of that.

Public opinion in Minnesota supports these bills.

There are several districts with representatives who support the bills, but a senator who does not or who is reluctant to do so publicly. Here is an opportunity for helping to change the mind or the position of such a senator. Find out who they are. If you are in their district, then you can contact them (or even if you are not). If you know someone who lives in their district, urge that person to contact the senator.

Why not send your state representative and senator a holiday card, and in it, tell them about your support of these two bills. Tell your friends to send those messages to those "reluctant" senators, let them know where they stand, and urge them to support sensible gun legislation to make Minnesota safer for everyone.