



Environmental Sustainability/ Stewardship

Every year, congregations spend thousands of dollars to heat, cool, light, and use their buildings. With a few energy saving renovations, these churches could save hundreds and thousands of dollars each year in operational expense, which could be used to improve their facilities and fund their ministries. In essence, the idea of “sustainability” is the biblical and financial concept of “stewardship.”

‘Stewardship’ is nothing new to Christians, who understand the responsibility of accepting God’s gifts and resources. In the same way that churches work to be faithful stewards of the donations they receive for ministry, Christians should also work to be faithful stewards of our planet’s resources. Psalm 24:1 reminds us that, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it,” and as Christian stewards of God’s creation, churches and individuals play a role in its care.

Research Shows the Way

In 20 audits of church facilities from 2008–2011, and research with the

Department of Energy, Disciples Church Extension Fund has learned:

- Most churches can save an estimated 30% of their annual utility bill through energy improvements in their facilities and their operation.¹
- Most churches are used less than 20% of the time they could be open for ministry, programs or community use.²
- Most churches spend more than 12.5% of their budget on energy, and less than 10% on mission.³
- Most church buildings are 40% too large for the average worship size of the congregation.⁴
- The average operation cost per square foot per year is \$1.67 for a church, compared to \$1.10 for a school.⁵

Case Study and Impact

In 2009, Park Hill Christian Church in Kansas City, MO, was spending more than \$25,000 a year on utilities and their facility was only being used 23% of the available time each week. Through an energy audit, the church learned that they could save more than \$12,500 a year in energy costs by making several improvements to the facility, changing a number of policies and increasing the use of the facility each week. The church realized savings of more than \$1,000 a month, which they channeled into increased outreach and mission. Due to their new-found vitality, the number of users of their facility increased by 300 people, and membership and the number of visitors grew.

Initial Steps

When a congregation wishes to consider becoming more sustainable, it should consider the following:

- Utility use and expense tracking year over year as a total cost and percentage of total expenses
- Energy audit of the facility
- Building use tracking of how each room is used each week
- Talking with local utility companies about potential resources available to reduce the cost of utilities



- Setting goals to reduce energy use and create policies that are environmentally friendly.

Easy First Actions

For most church facilities, the six quickest payback projects are:

- Lighting – replacing outdated lighting (exterior and interior-including exit signs)
- Insulation – increasing insulation, especially in roofs and attics
- Air sealing – caulking and filling cracks and gaps in the facility
- HVAC – using programmable thermostats
- Water heaters – using smaller, insulated and more efficient water heaters
- Appliances – discontinue and/or unplug little or seldom used appliances (i.e. refrigerators, coffeepots, televisions, computer monitors)

Ministry and Financial Planning

As a congregation considers its facility needs, it should always begin by evaluating the priorities and needs of its ministry. By identifying its priorities, a congregation can then make the necessary financial plans to build, maintain and operate its facility according

to those priorities. By understanding how best to efficiently and effectively operate a church facility, leaders can save money and potentially increase the outreach and impact of a congregation's ministry.

**For help in developing a ministry plan, contact Hope Partnership for Missional Transformation about their MissionPathways ministry planning service
800-274-1883
info@hopepmt.org
www.hopepmt.org**

**For more information about sustainability and stewardship, please contact Disciples Church Extension Fund
800-274-1883
info@disciplescef.org
www.disciplescef.org**

-
- ¹ Energy Star Website http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=small_business.sb_congregations
 - ² Based on a calculation of each room available in a facility, 7 am-10 pm hours, 7 days a week.
 - ³ Average calculation of 20 audits conducted in Church Extension's Green Building Program from 2008-2011.
 - ⁴ Ibid
 - ⁵ Ibid.