

There is much work to be done if we are to hand our great-grandchildren a world as good as the one we got. It will take many changes and even sacrifices. Now that the church is taking up the biblical mandate for creation care, I have great optimism. I pray that we will all keep in mind what is important, and that we will carve “God is love” on the tablet of our hearts. We are commissioned to do *God’s* will on earth through loving acts of faith. With God, all things are possible.

*—Serve God, Save the Planet*

If our congregations can see that we really do believe in protecting the planet God created, that we really do think conservation is a biblical practice, I believe that they will respect and support us in our efforts. If we bring the passion and the dedication, they will help us with the finances, with the rides, and with the infrastructure needed for our ventures.

*—It’s Easy Being Green*

# Church

## Ministry That Makes Cents

*Now you are the body of Christ, and each  
one of you is a part of it.*

*1 CORINTHIANS 12:27, NIV*

“Am I supposed to say anything?” I whispered to the woman who had invited us to the meeting.

“That’s why you’re here!” she responded.

Yes, it was a setup—in the best sense. Matthew and I had been asked to lead a retreat on stewardship of God’s creation. The church was in a period of transition and planning a major building project. The night before the retreat, we were asked to attend a presentation by the lead architect. Matthew and I immediately saw that little attention had been paid to solar orientation, green building materials, basic energy-saving principles, or the long-term environmental impact of the new building.

With my friend’s permission, we started to ask some questions about energy use, waste reduction, and maintenance. That’s when the surprise came: the architect was LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified and only too delighted to make environmental impact a priority. Suddenly everything from green roofs (living plants on the roof) to water-saving toilets was on the drawing board. We talked about the financial and environmental stewardship reasons for selecting materials that will last a century or more, and how outside spaces could be designed to attract the community. The discussion flowed to how the building could be best used by providing space for a day care and offering teens a safe place to hang out.

Like most major building projects, this one would take several years to complete. In the meantime, the church decided to change all the lightbulbs in the existing sanctuary, start a recycling program, offer a Sunday school series on creation care, and plan a yearlong series of public talks offering practical ways to conserve God’s resources—a creative way to welcome new people into the church.

Such miraculous turnarounds are happening in

churches all over the United States. One woman who attends a megachurch had a life-changing experience when she visited a park with her family. She felt called by God to help her church become a better steward of creation. This would not be an easy task: her pastor recently had made fun of recyclers—from the pulpit.

For the first year, she struggled alone, educating herself and diving deeply into creation care Scripture. The second year, she gathered a core group of four or five cobelievers. By the third year, the lead pastor had a conversion experience: he not only agreed to sponsor the group but also invited Matthew to preach to their seven thousand members. The church held a creation care fair around the sermons; their “small group” immediately had 250 members—including the lead pastor.

Such stories both encourage and inspire us. Once churches hear the biblical call to honor God by caring for his creation, they are capable of *big* changes—*fast*. That is why Matthew and I believe the church must get involved—first by cleaning up its own act, and then by reaching out to the world.

For encouragement, we remember the abolition and civil rights movements when the church provided the hands and feet necessary for seemingly impossible changes to become reality.

The same will be true in the environmental movement: people of faith can change hearts. Yes, government and science will be part of the solution, but the church must take on a leadership role. We offer something that is sorely missing from the environmental movement: hope.

With God, anything is possible.

## GETTING STARTED

Matthew 7 tells us to take the plank out of our own eye before worrying about the speck in someone else's. As sons and daughters of God, we need to clean up our own churchyards first. Lessening our environmental impact, consuming less, sharing more, and taking care of those in poverty are all ways that we can enrich our church bodies while greening up America's 350,000 houses of worship.

The changes we make at church show the outside world that we honor the Lord not only in what we say but also in what we do. Encourage your church leadership to conduct an energy audit of the church building, switch to fair-trade, shade-grown coffee, and stock up on reusable mugs. Use the church lawn as a mission field by starting a garden that attracts birds and butterflies while providing fresh vegetables to low-income families in your community. Lead a creation care study during Sunday school, and support each other as you reduce your environmental footprint.

D. L. Moody once said, "There are many of us that are willing to do great things for the Lord, but few of us are willing to do the little things." Seemingly small acts, like recycling used bulletins, really *do* make a difference.

## Let Your Light Shine

1. Weigh in on your energy use. Conduct an energy audit, either through your local utility or a performance contractor. Many church buildings can be made more efficient through simple changes, such as increased insulation, ceiling fans, LED bulbs in exit signs, and insulated curtains.
2. Illuminate your church. Change the lightbulbs in the church to energy-efficient ones. *We* are supposed to be a light to the world, not our sanctuary lamps.
3. Recycle. Recycle church bulletins. Encourage people to share their bulletins, and reduce the size of the bulletin to fewer pages. Print bulletins

on recycled paper.

4. Switch coffee. Purchase organic, fair-trade coffee. Show your love for our neighbors across the globe by not polluting their water supplies with herbicides and pesticides, and not tearing down their forest canopies. Use ceramic mugs instead of disposable cups.
5. Scatter seeds. Organize a church garden. Soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and local after-school programs will welcome your fresh produce. A church garden is also a great way to engage people who normally don't go to church but are interested in gardening or community service.
6. Share your stuff. Start an exchange program. Set up a bulletin board for people to post items they need and items they want to give away. Consider starting a library for tools and toys, in addition to books, magazines, and videos.
7. Teach. Start a book study or small group on God-centered environmentalism and discuss how group members can reduce their impact on ecosystems.
8. Pray. Hold prayer meetings for people affected by the environmental changes and natural disasters. Pray for wisdom to know how to help and the strength to carry out God's will.
9. Plant trees. Plant trees native to your region. Avoid using pesticides on church grounds.
10. Rideshare. Organize car pools to and from church. If you have many people coming from one area (such as college students or senior citizens), arrange for a van or bus to take them all to church instead of them driving separately.
11. Share your space. Share the church building with other organizations. Multiple church congregations can share one church building on Saturdays and Sundays. Soup kitchens and community groups can use the building during the week.
12. Power off. Turn off electronic devices in the church when they're not in use. Unplug empty refrigerators and prop them open to prevent the growth of fungi.
13. Reduce waste. Set up recycling bins in the church kitchen and throughout the building. Place boxes for cans, plastic, and paper, and bring them to the recycling center on a regular basis.
14. Clean green. Make sure that the cleaning products used at the church

are not harmful for the environment and contain no phosphates.

15. Curb clutter. Hold a church yard sale. The fewer things we have, the less distraction in our lives and the more time we have to spend with God. Donate the money raised to church outreach, missions, and worthy charities.

## **SHARING THE MESSAGE**

When we continue to increase our consumption and consequent abuse of the earth, we are impacting every segment of life—human relations, health, food sources, vegetation, water, air, wildlife, and natural disasters. The good news, however, is that we can make a difference. With God’s love and direction, churches can help lead the way by making decisions that put God’s ministry at the top of the list. In doing so, we are fulfilling part of God’s command to go out into the world.

Any real change in our churches begins with prayer. Ask God to give you the ability to reach out to others. Pray for a core group of people who are committed to caring for God’s creation. Share your ideas and strive to make small steps, starting today.

### **Creation care Bible study**

Changes in action begin with changes in the heart. Start a Sunday school class, book discussion group, or Bible study that helps make the connection between environmental stewardship and Jesus’ command to love our neighbors. Many study groups use half their time each week discussing a creation care reading, and half their time sharing the stewardship changes that they are making in their lives. Encourage one another. Be honest about obstacles and struggles you are facing. Make personal changes before recommending changes at church. By removing the plank from your own eye first, you will gain

practical experience and give credence to your message.

*Serve God, Save the Planet* includes an excellent discussion guide that hundreds of congregations have used to study creation care. Organizing a Sunday school class or book study will help identify and engage a core team committed to greening up the church. For more information, visit <http://www.servegodsavetheplanet.org>. You can access additional resources on the Internet through <http://aeoe.org/resources/spiritual/index.html> or the environmental stewardship section of your denominational Web site.

### **Movie night**

For a community-building event, host a movie night at your church, followed by a discussion of how our choices impact the health of the planet. You may want to start with a film that links faith and the environment, such as *Renewal* (<http://www.renewalproject.net>), *Mountain Mourning* (<http://www.christiansforthemountains.org>), or the faith version of *The Great Warming* (<http://www.thegreatwarming.com>). Look for discussion guides on their Web sites. If you use *Renewal*, preview it in advance and select two or three of the short segments that would work best with your congregation.

Other films you might consider include *Affluenza* (<http://www.bullfrogfilms.com>), *Kilowatt Ours* (<http://www.kilowattours.org>), *The End of Suburbia* (<http://www.endofsuburbia.com>), and *What a Way to Go: Life at the End of Empire* (<http://www.whatawaytogomovie.com>). You can also check your local library for films on related issues, such as *The Future of Food* (<http://www.thefutureoffood.com>), which exposes alarming facts

about the genetically engineered foods that now fill our grocery store shelves, or *The Power of Community*, an inspiring film that shares how Cuba survived peak oil (<http://www.powerofcommunity.org>).

### **Prayer**

Designate a weekly or monthly prayer focus for people around the world who are harmed by the effects of environmental degradation. Educate yourself about programs that address the interrelated issues of poverty and environmental restoration in countries such as Ethiopia, Sudan, Haiti, Madagascar, and Kenya (<http://www.edenprojects.org>; <http://careofcreation.net>).

### **Newsletter**

Write a creation care column for your church newsletter or bulletin. Provide educational information on important local, regional, and global environmental issues and tips for personal action. For article ideas, sign up for the free, weekly Eco-Justice Notes (<http://www.eco-justice.org/e-list.asp#forms>), check out the monthly news capsules at <http://www.nccecojustice.org/capsulessept08.html>, or subscribe to *Creation Care* magazine (<http://www.creationcare.org/magazine>). Then spur your church into action!

### **Teaching kids to love creation**

Make creation care a priority in your church by teaching kids to love God's creation. Consider choosing a creation-themed curriculum for vacation Bible school, like God's Big Backyard from Standard Publishing (<http://www.vacationbibleschool.com/vbs2008>). Reviews of other curricula can be found at <http://>

www

[.eco-justice.org/CurricReview.asp](http://eco-justice.org/CurricReview.asp).

Engage young people in action: keeping the community safe and healthy is a tangible way to love our neighbors. For teens, help plan and carry out an outreach project, like a park or streambed cleanup. Plant trees on the church grounds or in the community. Also, consider offering a creation care study with your youth group, using Emma's book *It's Easy Being Green* as a guide.

### **God's Hands**

Last summer, Emma was asked to help with a vacation Bible school. Two of my friends shared the creation care message with the older kids, and Emma worked with the three- and four-year-olds. She told the parable of the Good Samaritan and then invited the children to act out the story. Of course, everyone wanted a part, so Emma had three innkeepers and several Good Samaritans.

One of Emma's favorite questions of the day was "What's an innkeeper?" Back to basics! The children learned that innkeepers take care of people who are hungry and tired, and that taking care of God's creation is one way of loving our neighbors.

Before the morning was over, all of the children made handprints, inscribed with a promise of what they would do to help care for the earth. Perhaps footprints would have been even more symbolic—representing their carbon footprints. Fortunately, however, Emma knows her audience. She's still young enough to remember that wet paint on little feet would have been a wee bit too tempting!

### **Earth Day Sunday**

Psalm 24:1 declares, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." Affirm this idea as a church body by celebrat-

ing Earth Day Sunday. Talk to your pastoral staff about planning a special service to highlight our responsibility as Christians to care for creation.

During the weeks leading up to Earth Day, display books and articles relating to creation care in the church library or lobby. Write creation care articles for the church newsletter. On Earth Day Sunday, worship outdoors. Sing hymns about nature, such as “This Is My Father’s World” and “For the Beauty of the Earth.” Incorporate praise songs, liturgies, and Scripture readings that celebrate nature and encourage stewardship. You can access resources through <http://www.livinglightly24-1.org.uk/church.html>; <http://www.creationcare.org/resources/sunday/sermon.php>; and <http://www.webofcreation.org>.

### **The Generation That Could**

Last April, Emma was invited to give a sermon at a church in Louisville. The church combined an Earth Day celebration with their annual youth-led service. Chairs were set up outside, the youth sang songs glorifying God for his creation, and the young people acted out the story of creation in Genesis. They also dedicated a tree that the youth planted on the church grounds.

Before Emma started her sermon, the pastor warned her that every time he had preached outside, his talk had been interrupted by a train—Emma’s podium was about 40 feet from the railroad tracks. He advised her not to get flustered, and to wait until the train passed before continuing.

Miraculously, the train did not come until the very end of Emma’s sermon. The timing could not have been more perfect. Here’s what Emma was saying just before the train arrived:

“When I was a child, one of my favorite books was

*The Little Engine That Could.* The story is about a big train that breaks down while carrying a load of toys and other good things to children who live on the other side of a mountain. The broken-down engine asks several other passing trains for help, but they are either unable or unwilling. Finally, he sees a tiny blue engine and asks that much smaller engine if he'll pull the shipment of good things to the children on the other side of the mountain. The little train looks up at that huge mountain and isn't sure he's up to the task. But finally he decides to give it a go. And all the way up the hill, our little hero puffs, 'I think I can. I think I can. I think I can.'

"Like that little train, we may feel like there's a huge mountain standing between us and the greener world we long for. But Jesus had a few words for us about mountains. In Matthew 17:20, niv, he says, 'If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'

"With faith in God, nothing is impossible. Living a green life is within the reach of every one of us. I think you can. God thinks you can.

"When the children from the next 'valley,' from the next generation, see us and the world we pass on to them, my hope is that they'll see a generation that was green. My hope is that they'll see a generation that took its choices seriously, that placed its faith in God and found the strength to climb the highest mountain.

"My hope is that they'll see a little generation that did."

Right on cue, the train whistle blew—a reminder that God's timing is always perfect.

GO GREEN: Looking for a comprehensive guide for making changes at church? Consider ordering the *Greening Congregations* -

*Handbook: Stories, Ideas, and Resources for Cultivating Creation Awareness and Care in Your Congregation*

(<http://www.earthministry.org/Congregations/handbook.htm>). This 225-page handbook will help you respond to the question, “Why should people of faith care for creation?” and develop an enduring, creation-honoring focus within all dimensions of congregational life.

## **CHANGES IN THE CHURCH BUILDING**

Your church facility can become a tangible testimony of how we can steward resources for the glory of God. Small changes to conserve energy, save water, use land and building spaces wisely, reduce waste, and cut transportation pollution will save money while showing respect for God’s creation.

**SAVE GREEN:** If all U.S. congregations made changes to practice environmental stewardship, they’d save an estimated \$573 million

annually and prevent 6 million tons of CO<sup>2</sup> from polluting the air. That’s the equivalent of taking one million cars off the road.

## **Earth Stewardship Principles**

Check your denomination’s Web site to find out if your church has taken a leadership stance in creation care. Below are the guiding principles for the Ohio Council of Churches’ policy on earth stewardship. Consider adopting similar principles for your church.

The earth was made by God, and we are called to be faithful stewards of creation. We are inextricably linked to all creation, each element of which is worthy of our respect and care.

As followers of Christ, humility, simplicity, sacrifice, service, and prophetic courage guide our decision making and our actions.

We are individually and collectively responsible for the ecological impacts of our consumption, locally and globally.

We are individually and collectively responsible to the entire human family, particularly “the least among us” and future generations who bear the cost of our excess.

### **Energy audit**

One of the first steps your church should take is an energy audit. Talk to the leadership about assessing current energy use so you’ll know where to start making changes. Your local utility provider may perform this service for no charge or a small fee. You also can hire a performance contractor to help prioritize energy-saving projects and oversee the implementation process.

Alternatively, if you have environmental engineers, science teachers, or other knowledgeable adults in your congregation, ask them to help conduct an audit with your youth group. Encourage the youth group to present its results to the church, along with proposed changes to increase energy efficiency.

## **Saving \$ and Energy in the Church Office**

Turn off all office equipment at night. Install power strips to avoid phantom loads that keep equipment partially powered up 24-7.

Use the power management software on computers so they switch to energy-saving mode when not in use.

Set the office printer to double-sided default to save paper.

Distribute documents electronically to church staff and members whenever possible.

Purchase paper products with a high postconsumer recycled content. Paper that contains 30 percent postconsumer waste costs about the same as regular paper; 100 percent will cost more, but the extra expenditure can be offset by reducing the length of or eliminating weekly bulletins and printing documents on both sides.

## **Lighting**

One of the easiest ways to make your facility's lighting more efficient is to replace incandescent lightbulbs with compact fluorescent ones (CFLs). CFLs cost about 75 percent less to operate than their incandescent counterparts and last about ten times longer.

Make sure exit signs are lit with LED lights, or consider installing Energy Star-qualified exit signs. These signs drastically reduce maintenance requirements and save money in electricity costs. Your church can save \$10 per sign annually while preventing the release of up to 500 pounds of greenhouse gas emissions.

It makes little sense to light rooms and hallways when they aren't in use, yet sanctuaries are often kept fully lit with no one inside. Turn off lights when rooms are not occupied; a simple sign next to every switch can serve as a gentle reminder. Rely on natural light whenever possible. Go a step further by installing occupancy sensors for lights, and reduce the length of time your lights operate. When daylight savings time rolls around, make sure to adjust outdoor light timers appropriately.

In your church offices, focus on task light, such as lighting a desk rather than an entire room.

**SAVE GREEN:** Compact fluorescent lights cost about 75 percent less to operate than incandescent bulbs, and they last about ten times longer. Replacing a 100-watt incandescent bulb with a 32-watt CFL can save about \$30 in energy costs over the bulb's life span.

## **Lighting the Way**

A number of years ago, Matthew and I participated in an ecology class held at a local church. We enjoyed meeting people who shared our concerns and encouraging each other on the creation care journey.

Matthew and I wanted to give something back to the church that hosted the meetings, so we purchased a case of compact fluorescent bulbs on eBay. The following week, we asked the group—including the minister of the church—if they wanted to grab some ladders and help us change lightbulbs. Everyone chipped in, and in less than an hour we had replaced nearly all of the bulbs in the church. It was both a bonding and empowering experience for the group—and one of the most satisfying \$54 investments Matthew and I have ever made!

### **Heating and AC**

Clean furnace and air-conditioning filters frequently. During peak heating and cooling seasons, they should be changed every month. Consider installing programmable thermostats that automatically reduce heating and cooling when areas are unoccupied.

Each month, natural gas pilots use \$5 to \$10 worth of gas. When heating season ends in the spring, turn off furnaces or boilers that have a standing gas pilot, when feasible.

### **Embracing the sun**

Make direct sunlight work with your heating and cooling plan, not against it. In hot weather, block the sun's rays from shining through the glass, especially on the east and west sides of your facility. Consider installing curtains or drapes and planting trees strategically to shade windows from the outside. In fall and winter, windows on the south side of the building can help create a warm and inviting climate in your church.

If lighting is needed for the parking lot, install solar-powered lights.

## **Fans**

During the warm months of the year, use fans to reduce the need for air-conditioning. Ceiling fans, box fans in windows, and whole facility fans in the attic can all boost your congregation's comfort level while cutting energy costs.

SAVE GREEN: A thermostat set 3 to 5 degrees higher in summer can feel just as comfortable when fans are used. Each degree of temperature adjustment can save about 3 percent on energy costs.

## **Air leaks**

Use weather stripping and caulking to plug leaks throughout your church building. One week during Sunday school time, arm everyone with caulking guns and get to work!

## **Indoor air quality**

Carpeting, cleaning products, and other off-gassing materials can contribute to unhealthy indoor air. Use live plants throughout the building to improve air quality. For more ideas, visit the Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air Quality Web page at <http://www.epa.gov/iaq>.

## **Appliances**

When the budget allows, consider replacing inefficient appliances around your church. Appliances that are used frequently or are on 24-7, like furnaces and refrigerators, have the biggest payback. Look for the bright yellow tags with information about annual energy usage and the Energy Star symbol, or visit [http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=appliances.pr\\_appliances](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=appliances.pr_appliances).

While you wait for more efficient replacements, use your current appliances wisely. Unplug any electronic de-

vices that are not in use to avoid phantom loads, or plug them into a power strip that can be turned completely off. Keep refrigerators around 37 degrees Fahrenheit (3 degrees Celsius), and freezers at zero degrees Fahrenheit (-18 degrees Celsius)—or the warmest setting that is feasible. To help maintain the correct temperature in your freezer, keep it full. If the freezer is partially empty, take up space with ice cream pails or milk jugs filled with water.

## The Church Kitchen

For refrigerators, watercoolers, and freezers, maintain an air gap of at least 3 inches between the appliance and the wall.

Check door seals for signs of cracking or hardening. You know it's time to replace the seal when you can easily pull a dollar bill out from between the seal and the frame on a closed door.

Use dishwashers only when full. You'll save energy, water, and detergent. Or better yet, ask for volunteers to wash and dry dishes by hand.

Set coffeemakers on a timer to ensure their heating elements are not operating longer than necessary.

Avoid using the oven in summer.

Unplug unused refrigerators and appliances.

**SAVE GREEN:** According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, congregations that practice environmental stewardship can save 30 percent on their utility bills.

**GO GREEN:** Each day, 6,000 children worldwide die from water-related diseases. Conserve water at church by fixing leaks, installing low-flow toilets, and landscaping with native plants. Use the money saved to help dig wells in Africa.

## **Water**

### **Leaks**

Even small leaks can waste many gallons of water each month—and money that could be used for other purposes. Schedule regular leak detection checks throughout the church and have leaks fixed as soon as possible.

In the summer, turn off water heaters that aren't used and drain the tank. Reduce the temperature on water heaters in use during warmer months. Heating water uses a tremendous amount of energy; an adjustment of even a few degrees can have a significant effect on your energy bills.

### **Sinks and toilets**

Install faucet aerators on sinks to reduce splash and save water. Consider purchasing devices for your toilets that reduce the amount of water used per flush. For an old-fashioned water-saving trick, place bricks or gallon jugs of water in toilet tanks to decrease the amount of water used during flushing. When toilets need to be replaced, purchase low-flow or dual-flush toilets.

GO GREEN: Flushing a toilet one time in the Western world takes the same amount of water that the average person in the developing world uses in a day for washing, drinking, cleaning, and cooking—10 liters.

### **Rainwater**

Landscaping with native plants and those that require little water to thrive will reduce the amount of water your church requires for landscaping. Water plants in the early morning and use a drip irrigation system instead of sprinklers. Or better yet, install a rainwater collection system to use for landscape watering. You also can irrigate plants with water that has been used for other purposes, such as dish-

washing.

## Greening Your Worship Space

Schedule cleaning shifts and special events on days immediately preceding and following worship services so the building is warmed or cooled on consecutive days.

Use natural light to your advantage. Windows and skylights can reduce the need for artificial lighting.

If your church has a direct entrance to the sanctuary from outside, make sure doors are properly sealed to prevent heat loss. As a temporary alternative to installing new energy-efficient doors, use weather stripping and caulking to stop air leaks.

Especially in sanctuaries with high ceilings, use ceiling fans to promote proper air circulation so your system doesn't have to work harder to keep the lower areas at a comfortable temperature. Ceiling fans can help with both cooling and heating.

Turn the temperature up 3 degrees in summer and down 3 degrees in winter, and ask your congregation to dress accordingly.

Install programmable thermostats that raise or lower temperatures an hour before the service starts to reduce energy use and promote a more comfortable environment.

Recycle paper bulletins, use washable communion cups, and serve (fair-trade) coffee in ceramic mugs.

### **Sharing your space**

Is there another congregation that needs a place to meet? Show them Christ's love while fostering Christian community by sharing your facility. Many buildings are equipped with both a large and a small sanctuary, so it's possible for two groups to hold services simultaneously. If noise or space is an issue, consider staggering service times or days.

Church mergers, especially among churches with declining memberships, are often difficult, but can result in

better stewardship of facilities and finite fossil fuels. Making neighborhood groups welcome—such as Scouts, recovery groups, food cooperatives, and homeschooling co-ops—will ensure that the building is used more frequently.

### **Where Two or Three Are Gathered**

Emma and Clark attend a church that doesn't own a building. One reason they were attracted to the church was that a larger percentage of donations go toward relationship building and service rather than toward maintaining a physical structure.

The church started thirty years ago as an outreach to the university campus, with a focus on fellowship and sharing God's love with others. Their leadership believes that it's difficult to know each other deeply once the congregation grows beyond a hundred people, so every time they reach one hundred and forty, a few dozen people split off and start a sister church community.

The church rents space in a house of worship near the university campus. Because the church is active nearly every day of the week—leading a homeschool cooperative, organizing classes and prayer meetings, holding home groups, and extending fellowship to non-believers—they have had to shift spaces several times over the years; for some congregations such changes would be disconcerting, but this group seems to go with the flow.

Because they hold their weekly service on Saturday night, church sharing is not difficult. Emma and Clark also attend home groups once a week and a praise and worship service held on Thursday nights in a campus facility. On Friday nights, about seventy young people gather for a coffeehouse, hosted in the home of five guys who live in community.

When I hear the word *church*, my first image is usually a white steepled building. Jesus, however, made it

clear that church is not a building—it is the people who make up the body of Christ. Wherever two or three are gathered, he is present.

Praise God for churches that are willing to share their beautiful—but often empty—houses of worship, and for congregations that focus on fellowship more than facilities.

### **New construction**

All new construction uses energy and resources. Before embarking on an expansion or new building project, explore the possibility of using existing facilities within the community.

A friend recently told me about a church in Ohio that meets in the YMCA. The church believes it can reach new people in the community by integrating their ministries with the child-care, soccer league, after-school, and exercise activities that the Y offers. Church members have plenty of opportunities for service outreach through the Y, and Bible study classes are now offered in the facility. Three church plants in the area soon will be establishing partnerships with their local YMCAs, allowing the congregations to focus on community building and outreach rather than capital campaigns.

## **Building Green**

If your church is planning to undertake a new building project, talk to the building committee about implementing energy-efficient design and construction. Work with the committee in the planning stages; you will save money and resources for years to come. Also consider renewable energy options, such as wind and solar power, and the possibility of geothermal heating and cooling.

One way to show your concern for the environment is to get your building certified under the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating system of the Green Building Council (<http://www.usg->

bc.org). Your local chapter of the American Institute of Architects (<http://www.aia.org>) also has resources on environmentally responsible buildings, as does the Environmental Protection Agency (<http://www.epa.gov/green-building>).

## **Community garden**

Using your church's outdoor space to grow a garden will draw people to the church and allow you to donate produce to a homeless shelter or food bank. Start a gardening group at church, or encourage your youth group to lead the project. Church members, especially those who live in apartments, should be encouraged to adopt a plot for their own use or to share with others.

Start a compost heap for yard and kitchen scraps to reduce waste and eliminate the need for chemical fertilizers. In rural areas, the compost pile can be open; in the city, you should use a compost barrel or other enclosed system.

## **Pesticides**

Instead of depending on harmful pesticides to rid your church of unwanted bugs and other critters, consider implementing an integrated pest management program. This is especially important if you have a vegetable garden or if children and youth spend time playing outdoors on your church's property.

People can unwittingly carry pesticides into the church on their shoes and clothes, spreading chemicals and contributing to poor air quality. Sponsoring an educational program on chemical-free lawn and garden practices is a tangible way to show love for our neighbors and future generations.

Learn more about integrated pest management systems at <http://www.epa.gov/opp00001/factsheets/ipm.htm>.

## **Wildlife**

Enlist youth and other nature lovers to transform your church grounds into a haven for birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. Plant berry bushes and hang bird feeders that will attract a variety of birds. Select native vegetation that draws butterflies and will require little maintenance. Maintain old trees and plant new ones to attract other wildlife. With a little bit of effort, you can provide a beautiful space for people to pray and experience the beauty of creation firsthand.

## **Cleaning products**

Talk to your custodial staff about switching to nontoxic, biodegradable cleaning products that are not made from petroleum. Green cleaning supplies can now be purchased easily at office supply, grocery, and home improvement stores. Keep your church clean without damaging the planet, harming your custodial staff, or degrading indoor air quality.

## **The Prodigal Son**

A few years ago, Matthew was asked to preach at the church where he grew up. For nearly three decades, Matthew had completely rejected organized religion, vowing never to step into a church again except for a wedding or a funeral or, in his words, “when someone is wed or dead.” So when the lead pastor of this now very large and vibrant mainstream church asked Matthew to preach their first creation care sermon, it was like the Prodigal Son returning home—no bitterness, all sweetness.

Matthew preached once in the spring and then again the following fall. In the intervening time, the church formed five book groups to study *Serve God, Save the Planet*, using the discussion guide to apply stewardship

principles to their daily lives at home, work, and church.

Out of these book studies, an ongoing creation care group was formed. The group recommended energy-saving actions throughout the church, including changing lightbulbs, making recycling bins readily available, and using nondisposable dishes.

One church member bought a dozen cases of lightbulbs to share at cost. They sold out immediately, with requests for more bulbs at the next service. The pastor and creation care group also encouraged their building committee to hire a green architect for their \$3.4 million addition.

Now the group is reaching out to the community. The choir director and pastor have recorded a CD (they have a spectacular music program), and all proceeds are donated to a nonprofit that promotes earth stewardship at churches throughout the country. A member of the creation care group organized a sale of hand-crafted pottery filled with meals prepared by the congregation. The pastor has recommended that creation care be designated as one of the church's ongoing missions. Like the work they do to support a hospital in Guatemala, earth stewardship is now recognized throughout the church as an opportunity to love their global neighbors.

## **WASTE REDUCTION**

### **Disposables**

Replace disposable plates, cups, and silverware with reusable dishware. If you are short on supplies, ask for donations from church members. Most people are glad to de-clutter their kitchen cabinets and share some infrequently used dishes with the church. Or purchase a large collection of compact, stackable dishes that do not take up a lot of storage space.

If paper products have to be used at times, purchase plates that can be composted and napkins made from recycled paper. Buying the products in bulk from office supply stores can significantly reduce costs. Check out the EcoEasy products now available from <http://www.staples.com>.

In the bathrooms and kitchen, use donated hand towels instead of paper towels. Set up a weekly rotation of volunteers to wash them.

### **Paper**

E-mail newsletters and monthly calendars to parishioners when possible. Recycle bulletins or choose another method of making announcements and helping the congregation follow the service order. Many churches now project hymns, Bible readings, and announcements on screens during the church service, so there is less need for bulletins. Calendars with church events can be posted on Web sites and bulletin boards.

### **Recycling**

Whether your weekly service attendance is 50 or 5,000, you have materials around your church that can and should be recycled on a regular basis. Recycling items like aluminum cans, glass and plastic bottles, old bulletins, cardboard, and paper from the church office keeps them from crowding the landfill. If your church does not already have a recycling program, talk to your building management about starting one; you might want to ask the youth program to help sort and collect the recyclables. For more information on recycling centers in your area, visit <http://www.earth911.org/recycling>.

If your city or town doesn't have an official recycling

program, work with other local churches to get one started. Recycle Bank (<http://www.recyclebank.com>) rewards recycling efforts with points that can be redeemed at hundreds of local and national businesses. Help your church become better stewards and get paid to recycle.

To offset green expenses in the church or fund a community-wide creation care project, ask church members to bring aluminum cans, electronics, cell phones, and ink cartridges to the church to redeem for cash.

### **Leftovers**

If your church hosts large meals that occasionally result in significant amounts of leftover food, don't throw it away; donate it to a local soup kitchen instead. Visit <http://feedingamerica.org> to learn more about food rescue organizations in your area.

## **A Cleaner Getaway**

Reduce your congregation's carbon footprint as you travel to and from church. Encourage members of your congregation to walk or bicycle to church when possible. Installing bike racks on church property will encourage people to bike to church events instead of hopping in the car. Remember, as far as we know, Jesus only rode once in his entire ministry, and that was on a borrowed colt.

To encourage carpooling, make a map that shows areas where parishioners live to help coordinate the effort or start a rideshare board—either in the church lobby or online.

## **CONTINUING THE JOURNEY**

### **Local foods**

The next time your church decides to share a meal, make it a local food potluck. Encourage members to bring dishes and vegetables purchased from local sources like the farmers' market or grown in their own gardens.

Create and distribute a directory of local food sources, and encourage people to purchase shares in CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture). Take orders for local butter, cheese, and eggs, and arrange for pickup on Sundays after church. Raise awareness among your congregation about eating seasonally and purchasing foods that traveled fewer miles to reach the table.

During vacation Bible school and other events for kids, serve healthy, locally grown snacks that involve little or no packaging, like cheese and apple slices. If there are people in the church who have farms, orchards, or gardens, arrange a field trip to increase awareness of where food comes from and the care needed to raise and harvest local produce.

### **Share board**

Provide a bulletin board for church members to post messages about needed services and goods, or food, furniture, and equipment they want to give away.

The more church people share what they have, the stronger the church community becomes. A share board also will save money by avoiding the purchase of items people use only occasionally.

### **Fair-trade coffee**

Trade in your standard coffee for shade-grown, fair-trade coffee. When your church brews fair-trade coffee, more of the money you spend reaches the farmers in developing countries who actually grow it. Moreover, their land is not left devastated by clear-cutting and the overuse of dangerous pesticides and herbicides required to grow coffee in unnatural conditions. Fair-trade coffee is a direct way in which our actions can show love for our global neighbors.

Consider asking your creation care group to designate

part of their yearly tithe to covering the extra cost of fair-trade coffee.

### **Service**

Look for a park or other area around your church that is littered with trash and plan an environmental service day for church members. Foster community in your church and inspire a deeper love for creation as you serve side-by-side with people in your congregation.

As your church decides where and how to serve, choose mission projects that empower needy people to become self-sufficient. Many churches have mission programs that improve sewage systems, dig wells, improve crop diversity, prevent future environmental disasters, and offer loans for starting small businesses, such as vegetable stands.

### **Partnering with like-minded groups**

Encourage the formation of local ecumenical environmental groups. In our town, a group of people formed a creation care group after Matthew spoke at a local church. Representatives from several churches attend the bi-monthly gatherings. They quickly gained positive exposure by recycling at summer town concerts and a major Christian music festival. The group gave away hundreds of free trees to local citizens for Arbor Day and has become involved with city planners to discuss how to create a greener community.

The creation care group also sponsors a community garden, which is located on a church property. In addition to offering individual plots for a small fee to people who want to grow their own vegetables in the garden, a large area is planted with vegetables to give to needy people. Planting, harvesting, and sharing the food creates a

beautiful community spirit among the members of the group. People at a low-income housing development who receive the food are extremely grateful for fresh, organic produce.

Individuals in the group also write a green article for the town's monthly newsletter and invite the community to hear speakers on subjects such as native trees and plants, mountaintop removal, rain gardens, and meeting the material needs of refugees. They host potlucks, make local eggs available at meetings, and have plans to share other local foods.

Here's the most inspiring part: this group has only been in existence for a little over a year! It's amazing what God can do through a few faithful followers.

## Web Resources for Green Congregations

<http://www.creationcare.org>. Part of a growing movement among Christians to respond faithfully to the biblical mandate for stewarding God's creation, the Evangelical Environmental Network publishes *Creation Care* magazine, engages directly in advocacy, and produces helpful curricula and congregational resources.

<http://www.earthministry.org>. An ecumenical, Christian nonprofit that helps individuals and congregations connect their faith with care for the planet, Earth Ministry has created many resources for congregations, including the *Greening Congregations Handbook: Stories, Ideas, and Resources for Creation Awareness and Care in Your Congregation*.

[http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=small\\_business.sb\\_congregations](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=small_business.sb_congregations). The Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Web site provides resources for cutting energy costs at church, including a downloadable congregations guide titled *Putting Energy into Stewardship*.

<http://www.theregenerationproject.org>. Interfaith Power and Light helps congregations make environmentally wise choices and offers opportunities to purchase renewable power.

<http://www.nccecojustice.org>. The National Council of Churches' Eco-Justice Working Group provides Earth Day liturgies, curricula, environmental justice resource lists, and various congregational programs. Check out their *Building a Firm Foundation: "Green" Building Tool Kit*.

<http://www.webofcreation.org>. Web of Creation is a clearinghouse for congregations to develop earth-keeping practices as well as to learn about the theology and ethics of caring for creation. You'll find the *Training Manual for the Green Congregation Program*, worship resources like the "Seasons of Creation" liturgies, and a comprehensive set of links to other sites promoting environmental stewardship.

## Success Stories

Christ Church, Ontario, California. Reduced its summer utility bills from \$600 to \$20 a month by installing solar panels on the roof and changing lighting.

Hebron Baptist Church, Dacula, Georgia. Saved \$32,000 and 450,000 kilowatt hours of energy in one year by revamping its lighting system and converting fixtures and exit signs.

All Saints Episcopal Church, Brookline, Massachusetts. Saved \$17,000 in one year by installing a new boiler with zoned heating, programmable thermostats, and more efficient lighting. They have invested 14 percent of the savings to buy 100 percent renewable energy, further reducing pollutants.

Be inspired by other energy- and money-saving success stories at [http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=sb\\_success.sb\\_successstories\\_state](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=sb_success.sb_successstories_state).

Through energy efficiency and clean energy technologies, congregations can cut utility costs by 25 to 30 percent, saving on average \$8,000 to \$17,000 per year.

## How to Save Money This Year

Shut down the computers in the church office when not in use	\$219
Turn off the power strip when electronic devices are not in use	\$200
Trade disposable coffee cups for reusable mugs	\$400
Use cloth hand towels instead of paper towels in the bathroom	\$390
Change exit sign lightbulbs to LED bulbs	\$150
Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs	\$210
Set office printers to double-sided default	\$100
Turn off furnaces/gas boilers with standing pilots and dial back the temperature of water heaters after spring	\$125
Weather-strip and caulk air leaks	\$400
Host a churchwide garage sale	\$2,000
Turn the thermostat up 3 or more degrees in summer and down 3 degrees in winter	\$4,500
Rent space to another congregation	\$12,000

TOTAL

\$20,694

## **. . . And Share It with Those in Need**

Donate money to purchase energy-saving bulbs for other congregations in your city.

Select a sister church in a poorer neighborhood and retrofit with energy-saving insulation, windows, lighting, and heating and cooling systems.

Provide land, seedlings, tools, and water for a community garden.

Work with your denomination's missions department to partner with a church in a developing country and help fund an energy-efficient building project.

Mobilize churches across the United States to become better stewards of God's creation through the Interfaith Power and Light campaign (<http://www.theregenerationproject.org>).

Partner with us at <http://www.blessed-earth.org> to share the creation care message with hundreds of congregations around the country, inspiring churches to reduce energy consumption.

## Putting Your Faith into Action

*Dear heavenly Father, you are the creator, the everlasting God. Thank you for entrusting me with the task of caring for your creation. Forgive me for the times I have neglected the things that are near to your heart. Take away any self-centeredness and apathy in my thoughts or actions, and help my church to make changes that will protect and preserve the planet. Increase my desire to serve you through caring for your creation.*

### **Lord, help me *today* to:**

pray that my church gains a better understanding of your heart  
for creation

look online to learn about my denomination's stance on earth  
stewardship

make a list of people who might be interested in forming  
a creation care group at my church

visit Web resources for green churches and download one of the  
energy-saving guides

### **Lord, help me *this week* to:**

give someone a ride to church to reduce transportation pollution

make a list of little or no-cost changes my church could make to  
become better stewards

see if my church serves fair-trade coffee

pray for people affected by environmental degradation around  
the world

### **Lord, help me *this month* to:**

encourage my church to conduct an energy audit

ask my pastor to preach a sermon on creation care or invite a  
guest speaker

talk to the facilities manager at my church about recycling  
options

ask the custodial staff about switching to eco-friendly cleaning

products  
turn the heat down three degrees in winter and up three degrees  
in summer  
establish a bulletin board where church members can post  
goods or services  
start a creation care Bible study group or Sunday school class

**Lord, help me *this year* to:**

form an ongoing creation care group in my church or community  
switch from disposable to reusable dishes at church  
plant trees on church property and in lower-income  
neighborhoods  
avoid use of pesticides and fertilizers on church property  
sponsor a series of creation care talks, open to the community  
start a sheet music exchange program with area churches  
help plan an Earth Day Sunday service and celebration  
start a community garden at my church  
install a rain collection system for harvesting water from the roof  
reduce energy usage at my church by at least 10 percent

# Summing It Up

## Getting Started

*I have:*

changed the incandescent lightbulbs in my church to compact fluorescent bulbs

switched to eco-friendly cleaning products at church

checked for water leaks and had them repaired

started a creation care Sunday school class

conducted an energy audit of church facilities

## On the Journey

*I have:*

donated leftovers from church meals and special events to a local food bank

eliminated pesticides and chemical fertilizers from church grounds

stopped purchasing disposable paper towels and dinnerware for church events

planted trees on church property and in poor neighborhoods

started an ongoing creation care group

## Green Superstar

*I have:*

helped my church start a community garden and donated produce to the needy

planned an environmental service day for church members

shared the church building with another congregation or organization

reused our gray water for irrigation

lowered the church's energy costs by at least 10 percent