



Greening Your House of Worship

Caring for our earth is a joyful practice rooted in the deepest ethical principles of our faith traditions. Our spiritual communities are natural places to begin to take concrete steps together to make our world a healthier and safer place for all.

This work can engage many different community members and is a great way to get youth involved. It's helpful to form a "green team" by assembling a group of four or five interested members of your congregation. Talk with your Pastor, the church board, and committees to find allies. Keep everyone in the loop!

- Do a walk through of your church, mosque, or temple and its grounds examining lighting, building insulation, office practices, kitchen and food service, heating and cooling, water use and landscaping.
- Acknowledge and give thanks for any positive steps that have already been taken.
- Identify projects that can be done internally at little cost and those projects which might require outside assistance. Remember, you don't have to do it all and you don't have to do it all by yourself.
- Create Goals. For example:
 - Increase congregant awareness of our collective impact on the natural world.
 - Determine what the baseline energy use of your house of worship is and set goals for reducing it. We have links at the end that can help you do this.
- Create a step-by-step plan for attaining your goals.
- Bring care for Nature into your worship service and scripture study or into more informal get-togethers—a Green Coffee hour, for example. Find the

connections between this work and the core values and mission of your congregation.

- Host films with environmental themes or invite speakers with expert knowledge on environmental subjects and discuss afterwards.

Lighting

- Install LED lights including Exit signs.
- Check the wattage of your bulbs—make sure you are using the appropriate amount of lighting. Over lighting an area can cause glare in addition to wasting energy.
- Post reminders where appropriate for people to turn off lights when not in use or install motion sensors.
- Install timers especially on external lighting.
- Upgrade old T12 fluorescent lights and their magnetic ballasts with T8 or T5 bulbs and their electronic ballasts especially if they are used frequently.

Windows, Walls, and Roof

- Caulk or install weather stripping any place that walls allow in outside air. Pay special attention to basements and attics.
- Install shades, blinds, or curtains especially on western facing windows to keep rooms cool in summer.
- In warm weather, if safe to do so, open windows at night and close them in the morning at least in rooms that are in daily use.
- Plant a deciduous tree within 20 feet of your window to keep your building cool in summer but allow the sun to shine in in winter.
- Install insulation in your walls. Roof replacement is an excellent time to add insulation to your attic and roof areas.
- As a general rule, use the greenest materials available especially if costs are similar. Avoid plastic, polyester and fiberglass in favor of natural materials whenever finances allow.

Office

- Use a Smart Energy Strip-Surge Protector\Turn off equipment when not in use.
- Printing double sided will save on paper use.
- Use paper with a high percentage of recycled content.
- Recycle your waste paper and cardboard.
- Use rechargeable batteries when feasible to do so.

Kitchen

- Use real dishes, silverware, and tablecloths. Congregants sometimes have extra sets that they are willing to donate. Thrift shops are overflowing with these items.
- Use cloth towels.
- If it is not practicable to use reusable items in all cases choose paper over plastic wares and styrofoam.
- Keep clean, empty plastic tubs from cottage cheese, sauces etc. and glass jars on hand for take home items. Easier and less wasteful than wrapping plastic around a paper plate.
- If you have a congregant garden, install a compost for your vegetable kitchen scraps for use in the garden.

Heating and Cooling

- Don't run your systems to failure. Start planning on replacing your furnace or AC about a year or two before the end of its lifespan. This will give you an opportunity to get your financing in order and find out about possible grants and rebates. It will also allow you to research the systems that will offer the greatest energy efficiency.
- Consider installing solar panels, heat pumps, or geothermal systems.
- Explore the feasibility of using a renewable energy provider for your electric needs. Before your contract with your current supplier expires is a good time to start researching your possible selections.

Water Use

- Use water saving fixtures like low flush toilets and water efficient faucets whenever possible.
- Use electric heat pumps, or on-demand water heaters when your existing equipment reaches the end of its life.
- Reduce the temperature of your hot water heater especially if the kitchen is not in daily use.
- Install a rain garden if room permits or a rain barrel if not.

Grounds

- Plant a congregant vegetable garden.
- Lawns are green deserts. Give half of your lawn back to Nature by planting a pollinator garden or native shrubs and trees.
- Avoid pesticide use, especially Round-Up.
- Plant evergreen shrubs around your building. This serves as additional insulation.

- Install a bird bath. Keep it clean and filled.
- Shade your parking lot by planting trees.

Resources to Help You on Your Way

Check out these general information sites.

- Energy Star provides help accessing your utility data as well as webinars and trainings on how to track your energy use.

[ENERGY STAR Benchmarking Guide](#)

[ENERGY STAR for Congregations](#)

- Duquesne Light offers a free online energy audit as well as rebates on a variety of items.

[Duquesne Light Rebates and Programs](#)

- Here's a brochure with tips to improve energy efficiency in your home.

[Climate Change Initiative at Home](#)

- Here are some great resources for understanding benefits available under the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (including for tax-exempt organizations)

[Federal Solar Tax Credits for Businesses](#) (Dept. of Energy)

[How the Inflation Reduction Act helps you and your community go solar](#) (Solar United Neighbors)

Check out these sites to learn about what other congregations have done.

- **Baptist**

[Green the Church](#)

- **Buddhist**

[One Earth Sangha](#)

[Earth Holder Community](#)

- **Catholic**

[National Catholic Reporter's initiative on faith and climate change](#)

[Care For Our Common Home](#)

- **Evangelical**

[Evangelical Environmental Network](#)

[Churches Going Solar](#)

[Lutherans Restoring Creation](#)

- **Interdenominational**

[Blessed Tomorrow: Moving Forward - A Guide to Climate Action For Your Congregation and Community](#)

Conservation Voters of PA

[Caring for the Earth: Opportunities for Religious Institutions to Protect Clean Water](#)

[Caring for the Earth Part 2: How to Install and Finance Green Infrastructure](#)

[Eco-Justice Ministries](#)

[GreenFaith](#)

[Greening Your Church: 9 Stewardship Strategies that Won't](#)

[Break the Budget](#)

[Pennsylvania Interfaith Power & Light](#)

[Supporting Healthy Houses of Worship](#)

[Reimagine Appalachia \[Justice/Faith\] in Action Sustainable Economy Toolkit](#)

- **Jewish**

[Hazon: The Jewish Lab for Sustainability](#)

[Jewish Earth Alliance](#)

[Dayenu: A Jewish Call to Climate Action](#)

- **Muslim**

[The Islamic Society of North America Green Initiative](#)

[ENERGY STAR® ActionWorkbook for Muslim Communities](#)

- **Presbyterian**

[Greening Presbyterian Churches](#)

[Presbyterian Mission Climate Care Challenge](#)

- **Unitarian**

[The Unitarian Universalist Green Sanctuary Initiative](#)

[Green Living Ideas from the North Hills Unitarian Universalist Church](#)



[350 Pittsburgh](#) is a Pittsburgh-based all volunteer non-profit. We focus on combating the climate crisis and work with an environmental justice ethic. We are affiliated with [350.org](#) and are a project of the Thomas Merton Center. We would be delighted to talk with you about greening your house of worship. 350pittsburgh@gmail.com