

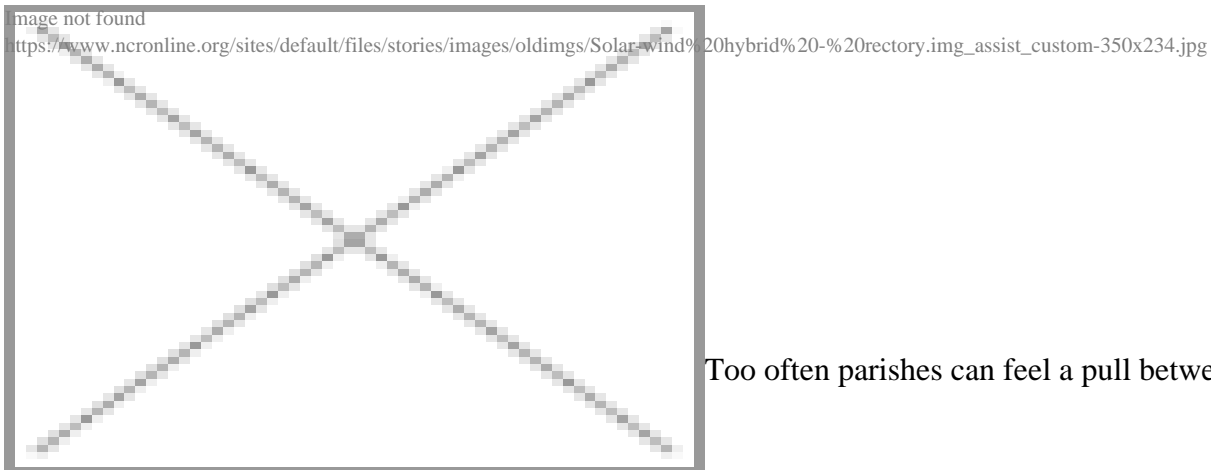
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Energy Star helps faithful witness energy stewardship, save money

by Charles Morris

Eco Catholic



Too often parishes can feel a pull between

witnessing to their mission while dealing with practical matters such as paying their bills. Fortunately, a wonderful partnership has emerged between the faith community, the business community and the federal government where congregations can realize savings while exercising Gospel stewardship, particularly in the area of energy.

Since I began Michigan Interfaith Power & Light back in late 2002, a key resource and partner in helping communities of faith achieve pollution prevention is the EPA's Energy Star for Congregations program.

Recently, I had a chance to interview the director of that program, Jerry Lawson about the benefits of participation in Energy Star for Congregations. Also participating was Steve Bell, a contractor with EPA

who helps coordinate the EPA's Portfolio Manager database program.

(Portfolio Management and its benefits for congregations will be subject of my next blog)

When did ENERGY STAR for Congregations first make its appearance?

"ENERGY STAR for Congregations made its first appearance around 1996. A few churches joined when we began Energy Star for Businesses. We saw that these churches needed to become more energy efficient as well. And it fit in with the faith community's focus on stewardship."

How does Energy Star for Congregations fit in with the larger Energy Star Program?

"We have 15 distinct building types in [our] portfolio manager. One of the modules is worship facilities. It's a companion program for small business ? one based in the community. Small business owners are members of congregations. Congregations are full partners in Energy Star."

What are some of the resources that Energy Star for Congregations offers to congregations? [Specific examples: Energy Star for Congregations Workbook, Portfolio Management Database System, other resources such as products and partners, etc.]

"We offer a quarterly newsletter. Since 2010 the newsletter has generated success stories each month. We want every religious denomination represented. We share the diversity in what they are doing to save energy. For example, there is a historic church in New England built in the 1700s that [has] doubled their square footage but have held energy costs constant."

We offer generic tools such as: rebate finder on the products page, a calculator that helps you find savings on Energy Star products, webinars. More than 50 types of products are part of Energy Star ? office equipment, commercial food equipment, lighting. New Department of Energy lighting standard for lighting efficiency has adopted Energy Star standard. Congregations email a technical question to epacongregations@energyandsecurity.com Putting Energy Stewardship Into Practice, our technical manual is still online. We will be promoting a new action workbook in the next month."

How, in your opinion, does this partnership between government, the faith community and business fit in with the teaching of the scriptures?

"We have yet to encounter a religious organization or denomination that does not in some way teach stewardship. Many put it into a creation care context. A lot of people are rediscovering what their faith tradition is teaching about resources. This is where science and faith are coming together ? what climate change [is] doing to the African poor or mercury's impact on unborn children. EPA's number one position is to protect human health. According to a recent study of the Aspen Institute, thousands and thousands of jobs are created when you protect human health."

How do you respond to those who say you are mixing church and state?

"I would assert that the separation of church and state is poorly understood. The first amendment is saying that we are not to favor any one religious group over another. Naysayers react to the fact that folk[s] are motivated by faith and by a clean healthy environment. All the faith communities have their teaching to protect the earth. The motivation is already there. We see ourselves as a tool for taxpayers. Data [were] already being gathered in terms energy use by DOE [Commerical buildings energy consumption survey]. They have been finding out square footage, energy use, installed technologies ? fuel, HVAC, age ? since 1979. Why would EPA discriminate against churches that use energy and waste energy? The church is just another building as a source of pollution and energy waste. It is a joy to be working with the faith community because they aren't just motivated by saving money."

What are some tangible results that parishes who participate likely to find?

"Energy Star is applicable across homes, commercial buildings as well as industrial. People can cut

energy use by 25-30 percent and put it back into back into their mission."

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Are there partnerships with Catholic dioceses that loom on the horizon?

"There are a couple of dioceses with whom we have had conversation. We are looking for partnerships with dioceses. The diocese can aggregate energy savings through portfolio management as well as at the individual parish level. No EPA staff ever sees your data. The Catholic Church is one of the best suited faith institutions for participation in Energy Star and particularly in portfolio management."

Who is Jerry Lawson and how did he get involved in this ministry in the first place?

"As a little boy I spent a lot of time with my southern Baptist Republican grandfather who believed in taking care of the land. He taught me to eat what was on my plate. He taught me about composting, about tithing, etc. He liked to be outdoors. I learned that you don't trash the outdoors and you don't not take care of this good earth."

Energy Star has a building competition that's open to parish participation. Can you say a few words as to how this can be a benefit to a Catholic parish?

"The Building Competition can save congregations 25-30 percent. People like friendly competition. It is modeled a bit on 'Biggest Loser'. The first year [2010] it was only big companies who participated. Last year we had five congregations compete. This year we are hoping to have a huge number compete. We are urging people to show water conservation. We have made it a little more accessible. We now recognize a 20 percent savings in addition to best-in class. We have had facilities achieve 20 percent with no capital investment. Our team has clearance to assist any congregation that participates. We will, for example, be doing webinars to help congregations reduce their goals."

[The deadline to apply is May 23, and can be done at www.energystar.gov/battleofthebuildings.]

Part II will continue in my next blog with a discussion of how EPA's Portfolio Management works and how it can help congregations save up to 50 percent or more on their energy bills while reducing their greenhouse gas emissions.

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