

Engaging Your Congregation with Steeply Cutting Energy Bills

"Working with our team is one of the most inspiring and rewarding experiences I've had; we know we're doing something really important and keep each other's spirits up." Creation Care Team member

Technically, slashing your congregation's energy bills is straight-forward. The real challenge? Marshalling the will and people power. From our experience, here's what you can do to engage your congregation.

1. Assemble a Team – and Lead It Effectively

To turn commitments into action requires a core group – a creation care committee or green team.

- To help the congregation fulfill its commitment, this team will research, propose, and implement energy-saving measures.
- To help households make good on their commitments, the team will develop and implement a plan for encouraging and supporting congregants. This might include monthly informational e-blasts, organizing youth to help older members in their homes, asking clergy to give sermons or simply talk it up, selling energy-saving supplies, informational or celebratory events, and ongoing communication.



A team engaged in an effective meeting

To keep the team motivated, be clear about your group's objectives and how you'll accomplish them. Before each meeting, communicate an agenda and timeline and stick to them. Members should commit to what they will do to help achieve the group's objectives and should be expected to follow through. In this way your team's work together will feel satisfying – and team members will come back for more.

2. Have Your Congregation and / or Its Members Make a Commitment

Without a specific commitment, energy conservation can be a vague goal that goes nowhere. Here are some possible commitments:

- A [pledge](#) signed by individuals to reduce their home energy use by a seventh,
- A vote by the congregation to reduce energy use in its house of worship by 25%,
- A grant agreement that commits the congregation to a percent reduction, or
- A [covenant](#) to become a *Seventh Day* congregation.

An effective commitment specifies the target reduction, a timeline, and how this reduction will be measured, for example, using the [EPA Portfolio Manager for congregations](#), the [EPA household carbon footprint calculator](#), or H-IPL's online [Household Energy Conservation survey](#).

Creation Care Pledge for Congregational Members

The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it
Genesis 2: 15

Do not talk with one another for the sake of the world's well-being and our own. We are committed to agree with all the members of the church to reduce the amount of electricity and water used in their homes.
I, _____, as a member of _____ congregation, hereby commit to reduce my household energy usage by 25% over the next year, toward a target of 25,000 pounds of less annual household emissions.
I understand that I, as well as all others in my community, as well as all nations, share both common and unique responsibilities to respond to the greatest challenge of our time.

A household energy reduction pledge

3. Find and Create Community at Every Level

Your congregation and creation care team need to feel in abundant and excellent company as they undertake and lead the congregation to undertake changes. Community is important at every level:

- Leading your congregation to reduce its energy use is challenging. You are likely to meet resistance. Your creation care team needs to have each other's support and good thinking.



A green team sings a hymn playfully re-written to ask congregants to conserve energy

- Your creation care team leaders will get ideas and support from creation care leaders from other congregations. If your city has a H-IPL affiliate, take advantage of its support. If it doesn't, you may want to create one that can bolster your and others' efforts.
- Members of your congregation who are cutting their energy use need a place to share their challenges, questions, and successes. Create opportunities – a potluck, a special worship service, an evening discussion or group time after services - for them to talk with each other.
- Knowing that congregations across Indiana are doing what you're doing will be motivating. Let them know about H-IPL, its monthly newsletter and the Task of the Month newsletter.

4. Ask Your Clergy Person or Lay Leaders to Lift This Up – and Lead by Example

Energy conservation is a faith issue: an issue of caring for our neighbors and the most vulnerable, of being prudent stewards of God's gift of creation, of not wasting. When faith leaders convey this in sermons, prayers, newsletters and by example, they have a powerful impact on their congregations. Resources to help them are easy to find on the web. Your governing body and clergy should be asked early on to sign a household pledge – and you should help them walk their talk.

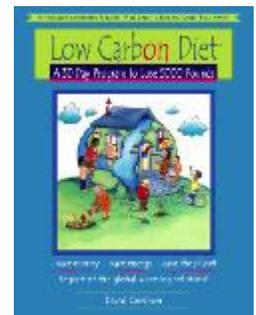


A pastor modeling Earth-friendly transport

5. Provide Tools and Guidance

Your congregation and congregants need to know what to do. Provide them with the information and tools they need to make good on their commitments. Such tools are easily available:

- the *Seventh Day [Task of the Month toolkit](#)*, a program for whole congregations that breaks household energy reduction into twelve bite-size pieces and provides technical and peer support for each,
- [Low Carbon Diet Workbook](#), a playful self-led guide for groups to reduce home energy use: exceptional for gathering a team & getting it on the same page.
- the *Seventh Day [household energy reduction checklist](#)*,
- the [Seventh Day Using Energy Prudently toolkit](#) for congregations,
- A tools & resources list can be found at www.seventhdayinitiative.org/resources/Seventh%20Day%20Brief%20%26%20FAQs.pdf



Low Carbon Diet workbook

6. Tie Energy Conservation to Solar Panels

Congregations are excited by solar panels but, because congregations don't benefit from the solar tax credit, panels are costly and have a long payback period. Congregations are less excited by energy conservation, which costs much less and quickly pays back its cost with savings. Tying solar panels to deep cuts in energy use is a motivating combination: it excites congregations and is cost-effective. For more information, contact the Seventh Day team at SeventhDayInitiative@gmail.com.

7. Communicate, communicate, communicate! To succeed, your community needs to hear about this over and over – in newsletters and sermons, on a bulletin board, from your youth, during religious education and weekly announcements, at congregational and committee meetings, through films and from speakers. In this way, energy conservation will become part of your congregation's culture. Keep your members informed of progress, provide them with tips, share challenges, remind them why all this is important. Keep it in front of their eyes! Above all, celebrate your successes - in community!



The Wrap (your water heater) Rap – a mission moment during worship



"This is doable -- it has to be, and it is!" Creation Care Team member