

A Religious Response to Energy Efficiency

Ohio Interfaith Power and Light

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Ohio Interfaith Power and Light (OhIPL), founded in 2007, is a faith-based organization concerned with environmental stewardship. Their mission: “To empower a religious response to climate change and to promote energy conservation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy” includes all religions and all people, urging them to love and care for God’s creation. By offering do-it-yourself energy audits as well as numerous energy-reducing resources and tips, OhIPL calls for the challenging and changing of detrimental actions to our Earth.



OhIPL, feeling a religious responsibility to maintain the Earth in the best quality possible, has accepted the statistical data about global climate change and has vowed to intervene. The organization has reached out to over 100 congregations in Ohio already and the results have been positive. In 2009, OhIPL and its interfaith partners through AEP Ohio distributed 35,000 compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). Those 35,000 light bulbs are equal to the prevention of 5 million pounds of CO₂ emissions and a total savings of \$250,000/year for each year of bulb life. OhIPL Board Chairman Dr. Greg Hitzhusen explained the goal of Ohio Interfaith Power and Light in a recent NPR interview, “This is a great way to free up funds in the budget, and at the same time is an expression of the values of our various denominations.” It is this exact notion that has sparked change throughout Ohio, one example being Sylvania United Church of Christ.

The same motivations behind Ohio Interfaith Power and Light have been at work in Sylvania’s United Church of Christ as well. Besides building their church on a hillside for passive heating and cooling, recycling bulletins, and introducing a high-efficiency AC system, Sylvania UCC has also implemented a 6.4 kW roof array. The First Solar LLC photovoltaic system, installed by Advanced Distributed Generation, is comprised of 126 2-by-4 feet panels, each capable of producing 60 volts of electricity, and 3 Sunny Boy converters. In its first three years of use, the system has harnessed 24,000 kWh of electricity or \$3,000 in savings. The Ohio Department of Development offered a 1:1 price match for the system, cutting the initial payback period in half. Although the system will not pay itself off for another 15 years, it has inspired even more change in congregation members outside of the church. A “Green Team” was developed in the congregation to encourage energy efficiency. In its first 3 months, 300 incandescent light bulbs have been switched to CFLs, a \$3,000 annual savings. Sylvania United Church of Christ shows in varying degrees what can be done to limit energy consumption while improving energy efficiency and saving money.

Another church that has been capitalizing on energy efficient practices is First English Lutheran Church in Columbus. In the early 1980’s, first English Lutheran’s Treasurer, John Fetters, realized that in order to survive in the community, changes needed to be made within the church. Over the next 20 years, the church adopted

fundamental energy changes in order to lower utilities and save money. One major change was the transfer to full energy-efficient lighting, something any church or residential home can do. The sanctuary lights were switched to large CFLs, the exit signs to LEDs, and the general lighting began to be consciously managed by congregation members. The most recent change, the re-lamping of their sanctuary with new CFLs, provides 20 percent more light without increasing wattage or expense. Lighting hasn't been the only area of change for First English Lutheran, however. The church purchased a waterless urinal, an energy-efficient heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) unit, and other EPA Energy Star approved appliances. Because of the overlapping changes it has made over the years, it is difficult to pinpoint a fixed number of savings per year, though Fetters estimates that over the past 20 years they have avoided around \$100,000 in utility expenses.

The first LEED gold-certified religious building in America, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Wayne County, has accepted energy efficiency as a way of life. Their standout church utilizes ambient lighting, CFLs, air-tight insulation, and a 1,500 gallon cistern—collects rainwater for 87 percent of church water used—to combat energy overuse. Rick Rottman, contractor for the church's build, described their commitment to energy efficiency in saying: "You have to learn to think a little differently. If you do what you can afford to do, like the church did, you end up with money back." Understanding your limits and making changes where you can will reduce energy consumption and save money.

By starting with the small things, lighting fixtures and insulation for instance, home and business owners can immediately start whittling down high energy bills. Ohio Interfaith Power and Light realizes the importance of making energy-efficient choices and encourages churches and individuals to start assessing their needs with an energy audit. 🐦



Sylvania United Church of Christ Solar PV Roof



First English Lutheran Sanctuary Lighting



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Wayne County's New Building