

Care for Creation Includes Where We Worship

by Chrystal Bartlett

Our gulf continues to suffer from the largest oil spill in US history, our churches struggle to meet overhead in a dire economy and worshippers of many faiths feel a renewed desire to care for the creation we've been called to steward. Surprisingly, all three issues can be addressed by close examination of the buildings we use to worship.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Energy, "Energy use in commercial buildings and manufacturing plants accounts for nearly half of all energy consumption in the US... more than any other sector of the economy. Commercial and industrial facilities are also responsible for nearly half of US greenhouse gas emissions which contribute to global warming."

Energy audits are one of the best ways to measure the energy our worship spaces consume and identify possible steps to increase energy efficiency. Addressing problems identified by audits can save congregations significant amounts of money, reduce our collective carbon footprints and help us better care for the planet.

Energy auditors are easy to find, since there are profits to be made, but congregations may qualify for

a free or reduced price by working with their local or state regulatory environmental agency or, in some parts of the US, through Interfaith Power and Light (IPL).

In August 2009, Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh, NC, contacted IPL and, in return for hosting an energy audit workshop for area congregations, received a free energy audit. IPL helped with the workshop and the audit was performed by a division of the state's Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Your area may be different, but check out the possibilities before you decide to spend money.

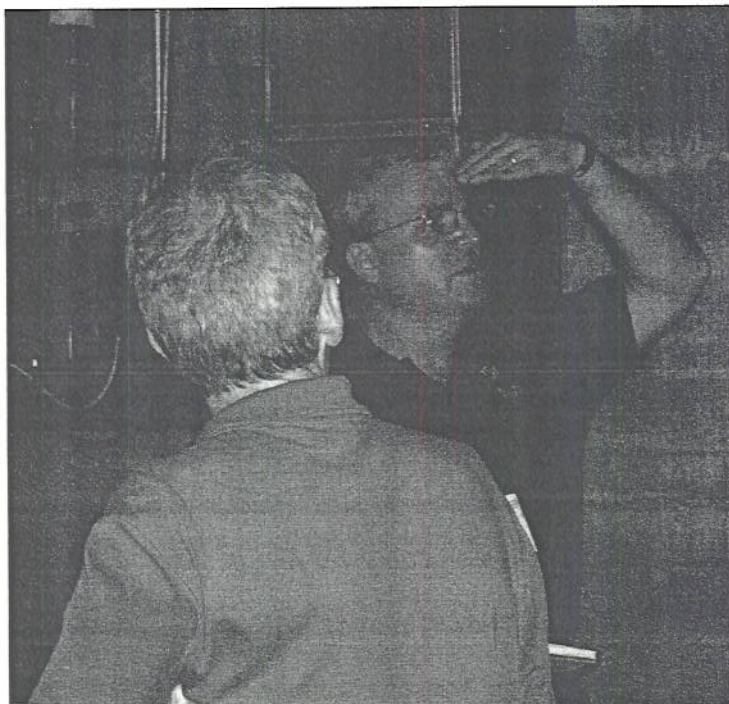
Energy audits are much like a building tour, but with stops you'd never make for visitors: boiler rooms, HVAC units, ventilation ducts, insulation and subfloors, alongside a close examination of appliances such as icemakers, copiers, refrigerators and lighting fixtures. Have copies of building blueprints on hand and be sure your facility manager, or someone familiar with the building, is onsite for the audit.

After the tour, Pullen received a written analysis, listing many steps we could take to reduce our energy use. This included closing an unknown wall vent and an unused cleaning entrance to a boiler chimney, both of which allowed treated air to escape the building.

In addition, appliances needed to be moved away from thermostats to prevent readings from becoming skewed. Furniture and appliances that inadvertently blocked return and intake air vents also needed to be relocated to increase efficiency.

The auditors also suggested that we analyze Pullen's power bills. Commercial buildings usually buy power in blocks and go over the estimated use costs—like we often do with cell phone minutes—when it would be wiser to choose a plan that most closely matches actual use.

Left: John Seymour, NC Division of Pollution Prevention and Environmental Assistance, and Building and Grounds member Greg Eades tour the Pullen Memorial Baptist Church building in Raleigh. Photo by Chrystal Bartlett.



news of peacemakers

If any program or building-use changes occurred in your worship space the past year, check your bill to see if the block you use is still the best match. If you have questions, your energy vendor can assist you.

One low-cost item was surprising, but made sense, once you consider how much longer the new compact fluorescent light bulbs last. Did you know dusting off bulbs after a year can increase the light they emit by as much as 30 percent? The old incandescent bulbs didn't last long enough for this to be an issue. (It would be good to consider this at home, too.)

Pullen also learned that icemakers usually arrive preset to make ice continuously, but the settings can usually be changed if your organization has irregular demand. The amount of energy this step can save is substantial.

Other low-to-no cost options may include using drapes to reduce room heat in summer months and opening them for free solar heat in the winter, moving desks near windows to use daylight instead of electric lights and turning copiers entirely off rather than keeping them on "snooze." If you can wait for them to warm up, you'll reduce your energy use.

Every worship space is different, since each congregation makes different demands of its space, so audit results will vary. In Pullen's case, the list was divided into two categories: what could be done internally and what items require a vendor to address. (Pullen is richly blessed with an all-volunteer Handy Corps that has the skill to address many issues.)

Vendors were contacted for estimates, and now Pullen is working through the list as volunteer labor and the budget allow. Even if all items are not completed, Pullen will still make significant steps to reduce the energy used by our building.

Saving money is good, but taking steps to reduce our collective energy allows each member to be invested in creation-care mission work. At Pullen, the audit provoked enough interest that the church brought in an expert from Cooperative Extension for a Wednesday evening program that focused on energy efficiency in the home.

The session was well attended and—in true missionary fashion—those who attended left stating they would share what they learned with others.

Creation care requires a multi-modal, multi-disciplinary response. Individually

and collectively, we can all help reduce our nation's energy demands, lower our use of fuels and greenhouse gas emissions. Energy audits are just one path to improve our stewardship of the world we all share.

—*Chrystal Bartlett is a communications and marketing specialist in Raleigh, NC, with a profound interest in en-*

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vironmental issues. She is a member of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, a BPFNA Partner Congregation. For more information about Interfaith Power and Light, go to <http://interfaithpowerandlight.org/state>.

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