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## Energy to spare at church? Leaders saving resources

### No consensus on environmentalism, but leaders eye ways to save resources

By [Kim Kimzey](#)  
[kim.kimzey@shi.com](mailto:kim.kimzey@shi.com)

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Environmental stewardship is no new concept at one historic Spartanburg church.

At First Presbyterian Church of Spartanburg, Pastoral Executive Scott Neely says in a written statement church members and staff have gradually "introduced improvements to the church's energy use and the sustainability of our practices."

Many First Presbyterian members are personally involved with environmental efforts through work, volunteer efforts or simply as Christians interested in environmental stewardship, Neely said.

The church has a volunteer-led recycling program. Church Hostess Patricia Webster composts waste from the church kitchen. A system monitors and conserves outside water usage.

First Presbyterian Facilities Manager Rick Isaac changed out lights in 32 exit signs from incandescent to LEDs, and replaced other incandescent bulbs with compact florescent lights.

Other more environmentally friendly and energy-saving measures have been made, as well.

About a year ago, church members formed a sustainability committee. That group, along with the facilities committee, recently toured the church with a consultant who suggested upgrades to help the church save energy and money.

John Adams with Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corp. educates Duke Energy customers about Duke's Smart \$aver Incentives program, which offers rebates to customers to save energy. WECC educates consumers, distributors and manufacturers about rebate incentives and handles residential and non-residential rebates, Adams said.

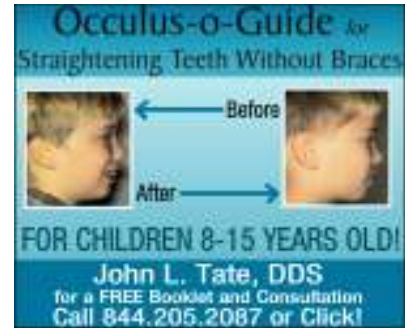
"With Mr. Adams, we are undertaking a more systematic assessment of our facility, to address many improvements at once. He is able to recommend technologies and programs, particularly through Duke Energy, that we might not otherwise know to access," Neely said.

Church members say they want to let others know about resources available to help become more energy-efficient and save money in the process.



*Kim Kimzey/kim.kimzey@shj.com*

John Adams, right, recently toured First Presbyterian Church of Spartanburg to offer suggestions on how the church could upgrade its facilities to become more energy efficient.



## **OPPORTUNITIES TO SAVE**

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Shelley Robbins is a member of First Presbyterian's sustainability committee and project coordinator with Upstate Forever, a "nonprofit organization that promotes sensible growth and protects special places in the Upstate," according to the group.

She wrote in an e-mail that many churches are "old" and "really, really inefficient" and have "huge opportunities for increasing energy efficiency," but most are unaware of available assistance.

Robbins said the Smart \$aver Incentives program is one, along with programs available from the S.C. Energy Office.

The office has an Energy Technical Assistance program that provides expertise and financial assistance with energy assessments, energy audits and technical assistance, Catherine Vanden Houten said in a phone interview.

Vanden Houten, policy analyst with the office, said the program is geared toward public entities such as state agencies and public colleges, as well as nonprofits and small industrial and commercial entities.

The program helps fund energy assessments.

An initial 50 percent match from the applicant is required for an energy audit, which Vanden Houten said is a "much more comprehensive assessment of their energy use." If a major measure recommended to save energy is completed, the applicant will be reimbursed up to 100 percent for the audit.

Applicants must own the facility to qualify.

The S.C. Energy Office also offers the ConserFund program. Through ConserFund, qualified applicants can receive a low-interest, secured loan of up to \$500,000 to make their facilities more energy-efficient.

Upgrades to lighting and HVAC equipment are some examples of what loan money could be used for.

"Will it save them money on their utility bills? If the answer is yes, then we can make the loan, provided that their financials are good and they have something they could use to secure the loan," Program Coordinator Rich Horton said in a phone interview.

"The interesting part of ConserFund is the loans are structured so that the debt service is covered by the energy savings," Horton said. "The money that an entity stands to save is greater than their loan payment amount. So, it really ends up being a big winner for those that take out loans."

The Smart \$aver Incentives program is available to residential and non-residential customers of Duke Energy, Adams said.

The program gives rebates for installing qualifying energy-efficient equipment such as lighting, cooling and heating units and kitchen equipment.

If applications are received with all the necessary information, he said it takes about two weeks for a rebate to be issued.

Available incentives are listed on Duke Energy's website. Non-residential customers must sign up as a trade ally or have the contractor doing the work sign up with the program, Adams said. Vendor applications are also available on the website.

## **LOOK FOR 'LOW-HANGING FRUIT'**

For churches looking to become more energy-efficient, Adams said to first go for

“low-hanging fruit.” Lighting is one example. Lights use a lot of energy, but are less cost-prohibitive to change out than a larger project and easier to address, Adams points out.

Josh Crotzer with Broad River Electric Cooperative said non-residential entities — including churches and nonprofits — that primarily consume energy during off-peak hours could soon see a decrease in energy bills.

Crotzer said the cooperative did a study last year and found that many small commercial accounts were being charged a demand rate (in addition to the rate per kilowatt hour) that they weren't using.

He said the demand rate is \$4.50 per kilowatt hour, in addition to 9.2 cents per kWh. The second rate has increased 2 cents, but the demand rate will be eliminated for qualified customers.

The new rates take effect Thursday.

Crotzer said the cooperative determines which customers qualify for the lower rate based on the account and energy usage.

Theological discussions on environmental issues can become “charged” and “difficult,” Neely said. Yet regardless of one's theological perspective on environmentalism, there are “very practical results” that come with more energy-efficient practices, he said.

“This is a question of better stewardship, which includes financial but also other resources.

“In particular, these improvements result in improved facility performance and use, which does have financial benefit, but which also leads to better functioning of the overall church system — the building's performance, the work of those who maintain and work in the facility, and the facility's use by church members and visitors,” he said.