

The Greening of Capitol Heights Presbyterian Church
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This is a brief account of the “greening” of a congregation. We say a congregation because it involves the building and the congregational lifestyle. Just as lifestyle decisions are made by a family or an individual to live within certain limits or to contribute towards a goal of health and well-being, a congregation will not only address issues of the building as though there is a formula to follow, though formulas are helpful. But rather for CHPC of Denver the assessment and choices begin in the heart of the congregation as a body and its leadership.

At times this was framed as an economic choice. Living towards the well-being of creation translated often into money saved, greater efficiency, and sustainability. Since its organization in 1896 and building of the sanctuary in 1911 the members have devoted themselves to caring for the building and good stewardship of their finances. Now covenanting in mission and celebration with the 10:30 Catholic Community since the 1970’s and Dignity Denver since the 1980’s, the three congregations share the same deep value of sustaining this place for ongoing witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let me share a litany of the actions that reflect the shared values of the three congregations covenanting together in witness:

Storm Windows

These were installed many years ago. They are not modern and up to date technology, but they create a dead air space that contributes to the warmth of the inside remaining in the envelop. In place for many years the windows reflect the early commitment to efficiency.

Efficient Furnace

Perhaps 14 years ago a more efficient furnace was installed. It is a boiler unit that pumps hot water throughout the facility. It is triggered by the outside temperature, not by zones. Though various radiator units can be regulated, the system does not respond to internal thermostats, only external temperature changes.

Single Stream Recycling

Around the building we have stationed blue containers to receive recyclables. They are weekly placed in the Denver Recycling bin for collection. That same bin is used by many in the neighborhood for their recycling efforts and we have welcomed that participation as a public witness to our values.

Xerox Reuses

Our copier was chosen in part for the system of Xerox that reuses the ink containers and parts that wear out. Xerox pays for the shipping of used parts for recycling and reuse.

Recycled Paper and Email

The majority of our communications travel the internet as email and video. We have capacity to meet online with video conferencing. We email the Open Letter for use online by all three congregations. It is our primary way of informing each other of events and news. Paper used for Sunday morning is recycled and is placed in the blue containers after use. The amount of paper used continues to decline.

Solar Panels

We host a grid-tied array of solar panels on our flat roof. A third party investor partnered with us by purchasing, installing, and pledging maintenance of the array for 25 years. We pay a small amount to Xcel for electricity because they offset our bill according to the amount produced by the array. We also purchase the amount produced by the array from our partner, Renewable Energy Ventures. Our initial cost was a \$500 contribution to the application process with Xcel Energy for the Solar Rewards program.

Community Garden

In 2014 with the leadership of member gardeners within the congregation, we created a permaculture garden on the land between the sidewalk and the street. It is a public witness to our shared values and it offers an opportunity for neighbors to participate in planting, cultivating, and harvesting from God's earth. It has become as well a haven for bees.

Rejection of Cell Phone Antennae

Approached by a company due to our strategic location for transferring cell phone radio waves, the Session considered for many months partnering towards this end. Questions were raised regarding the possibility these radio waves, though low frequency, might cause physical and mental problems to surrounding neighbors and to bees. To have proceeded would have violated the shared value to do no harm to creation and one another.

Water use

Denver Water in collaboration with Mile High Youth made an impact to lower our water use. Denver Water donated nine high efficiency toilets to the church. The Mile High Youth corps used the opportunity to train youth in plumbing by installing the toilets throughout our building. Without cost to the church we lowered our use of water.

Custodial Products

Many of the industrial products used in custodial care of our building were toxic to the environment and wasteful. Toilet paper was being purchased by individuals in the church as many rolls were taken from the church. Hand towels were over used and disposed of extensively. Solvents for tile floors and sinks were not proven to be environmentally friendly.

Empacs is now the source for paper products, detergents, and cleansers. They carry the ecologo which certifies they do no harm to the environment. Tork products sources our recycles paper for bathroom use as well as our hand soaps. As we purchased these products for use, Tork provides dispensers without cost to regulate the amounts used which also cuts cost for overall product by lowering waste.

Get the Glass Out

Local leadership has identified a problem in the single stream recycling. When included in the process glass actually causes problems. It breaks up in the process and contaminates other recyclables. Therefore, we have joined in the campaign to separate the glass from other recyclables. We have a separate bin outside for the glass which is picked up regularly by workers needing employment. In addition to contributing the recycling process and providing jobs, the bin collects glass from neighbors who are enabled by the church's witness to participate in caring for creation.

LED lighting

We have mounted a major conversion of our lighting from CFL's and fluorescents bulbs to Light Emitting Diodes. The CFL's contain mercury and must be carefully managed in disposal. The LED's are warranted to last for five or ten

years. If they do not function the manufacturer will replace the LED. The result will be a major decrease in our carbon footprint using less electricity and a safer disposal when the end their life. We will save money on purchasing a replacing lightbulbs.

On November 16, 2014 the Session officially endorsed a denominational pledge to care for creation. In making this pledge the Session was affirming what has been at the heart of the three congregations for many years. Already it is reflected in our education, worship, mission, and building use. With the pledge in place we join other congregations throughout the church in acknowledging that we face a challenge to the sustainability of the Witness of Faith and to human survival. Our assessments and efforts to respond to that challenge of global warming and climate change will continue.

Earth Care Pledge

Peace and justice is God's plan for all creation. The earth and all creation are God's. God calls us to be careful, humble stewards of this earth, and to protect and restore it for its own sake, and for the future use and enjoyment of the human family. As God offers all people the special gift of peace through Jesus Christ, and through Christ reconciles all to God, we are called to deal justly with one another and the earth.