

10 Tips to Help Your Church Go Green

BY KEN SLOANE [HTTPS://WWW.UMCDISCIPLESHIP.ORG/ARTICLES/10-TIPS-TO-HELP-YOUR-CHURCH-GO-GREEN](https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/10-tips-to-help-your-church-go-green)



The best way for your church to lead your members in a growing consciousness of being good stewards of earth resources is to lead by example. The bonus in many of the ideas below is that, in the long run, going green will often free up money that can be used to grow mission, engaging with your community to make disciples.

Trustees and members of the finance committee can bring expertise and energy (pardon the pun) to this work as they lead the way in reducing our carbon footprint and becoming better stewards of limited resources.

Many of these steps may require some up-front expense to realize long-term gains, but we encourage you to inform your congregation of your creation care efforts. You may find special donations that will help you move through these ideas quickly.

1. **Keep many of your meetings virtual.**

It will be great when we all feel safe to come together for worship in person, but we've learned from the pandemic that many meetings work well when they are conducted virtually. We've all heard reports of some of the positive environmental impacts of more than a year of people staying home more and driving their cars less. Just in the U.S., imagine the impact of 33,000 United Methodist churches continuing to meet virtually – with no one having to start and drive a car and no heating or cooling or lights having to be turned on in churches, coffee pots started, or cookies purchased. Will virtual meetings be better for every gathering? Of course not, but where it works just as well, it will make an impact for the care of the planet and for conserving the resources of churches for more important purposes.

2. **Organize car-pools and ride sharing to build relationships and lower CO2 emissions.**

Our mission as a church is to make disciples, and making disciples happens through relationships. Helping to organize and encourage church attenders to be carpoolers

and ride sharers can make members feel more comfortable about building relationships with neighbors in the community who don't attend church. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, motor vehicles are responsible for 28.2 percent of the CO2 (carbon dioxide) released into our air, the largest single contributor to greenhouse gases blamed for global climate change. Fewer cars in the church parking lot could be a sign of a healthy congregation and a slightly healthier atmosphere.

3. **Do an efficiency study on church appliances.**

Many church refrigerators run all the time, even when people are not in the building. Some run for the sole purpose of keeping coffee creamer preserved for the next Sunday or meeting night. Unplugging a full-sized refrigerator (until an event requires it) and running a smaller unit is more cost-effective and better for the environment, and it can lower the church's energy bills.

4. **Have heating and cooling units serviced regularly for top efficiency.**

Often, your local HVAC providers offer reasonable service plans to do annual checks

of your heating and air conditioning equipment. By keeping your unit cleaned and serviced, you maintain efficiency, waste less fuel, detect environmentally damaging leaks and exhaust issues, and often extend the life of your units.

5. Make the move to LED light bulbs.

The average LED bulb with equivalent light output of a sixty-watt incandescent bulb uses eighty percent less electricity. These bulbs also produce less heat, which will help offset summer cooling costs. Fluorescent fixture tube bulbs can also be replaced with LED equivalents, which will improve energy efficiency even more.

6. Be an off-peak energy consumer.

Most churches have their peak energy use at times that are non-peak for utility companies – on weekends, especially Sunday. This is helpful to the environment in that high-demand times mean more fuel consumed and more carbon released into the air. There might be a savings to being recognized as an off-peak energy consumer, and an inquiry to your electricity provider might result in a lower rate per kilowatt charged. It's worth investigating.

7. Purchase programmable, smart thermostats.

If your church is still working with the thermostats that were installed ten or twenty or more years ago when your building's heating and cooling units were installed, newer smarter programmable units are almost a guaranteed savings. While these thermostats are not hard to install, check with your HVAC service provider before you purchase these on your own. Your HVAC service professional can often provide commercial units that are more reliable and efficient than what homeowners purchase at a home improvement store or online.

8. Consider replacing a traditional water heater with tankless, on-demand units.

A forty- or fifty-gallon water heater was not very economical running in your church during the pandemic, and odds are, it is still inefficient as you move toward reopening your facility. A new generation of tankless, on-demand water heating units can be mounted in-line under sinks and will heat water only when needed. These units can cost as little as \$200, use a fraction of the energy of larger units, and probably can recoup their cost in as little as a year.

9. Give careful thought to adding solar panels to your church energy plan.

Solar radiation is a wonderful source of clean energy that, depending on the location of your church and its orientation to the sun, might be a great resource for you. Before you invest in a solar energy installation, do your due diligence. Check with the conference treasurer or trustees to find out the experience of other churches in your area and their appraisal of the vendors they used. Research what federal, state, or local incentives there are for making the investment. No doubt you will find some churches that made an amazing impact on their energy costs, while making a positive impact in reducing their carbon footprint.

10. Lead your congregation in the three R's: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle

I. Reduce – Limit the amount of waste your congregation produces.

II. Reuse – Use certain items more than once before discarding.

III. Recycle – Sort and discard items according to their properties (paper, glass, compost, etc.) Be sure waste cans and recycling bins are properly labeled and place them in as many areas of your building as possible.

IV . Rejoice! – Celebrate each success after it occurs.