



Stewardship of Creation Notes

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The Story of First Presbyterian Church's Carbon Neutral Journey in Tallahassee, FL

We live in a time of rising awareness of the importance of good stewardship of the planet God created for us. The members of First Presbyterian Church are committed to doing their part to reduce the church's impact on the environment and have decreased the church building's reliance on fossil fuels and made the church carbon neutral.

The church installed compact fluorescent light bulbs in all light fixtures and 25.5 kW solar panels on its education building. It replaced old metal windows with more energy efficient ones and installed a new more energy efficient HVAC system. The church offset its carbon emissions by retrofitting low-income homes to make them more energy efficient. All these steps combined reduce the church and community's reliance on fossil fuels and lower carbon emissions.

What does all this mean?

Nationally, in 2006, the Presbyterian denomination adopted a resolution calling on all Presbyterians to go carbon neutral by lowering their carbon emissions and offsetting any remaining carbon emissions because of the harm they are having on the environment and on neighbors far and wide. The combined steps of reducing energy usage from fossil fuels and offsetting remaining carbon emissions make the church carbon neutral.

How did First Presbyterian do all of this?

To reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, First Presbyterian, in its most recent capital fund raising campaign, agreed to fund the solar panels and to upgrade the church's windows and heating and cooling system. The solar system cost around \$100,000 after a state rebate of \$100,000.

Although the system has met about 25 percent of the church's energy needs in its first year of operation, payback was NOT an issue for church members. The members consider this a part of their stewardship mission to care for creation. To read more about this, go to www.oldfirstchurch.org and click on *Real Time Data* in the upper right hand corner on the home page. .

First Presbyterian calculated that it generated 84 tons of carbon in the year prior to the solar panels and the other energy efficiency improvements. As part of its witness to making amends, the church decided to offset those past carbon emissions. In the future, the tons of carbon to be offset each year will be much lower. To offset those past carbon emissions, the church choose to spend its money and volunteer time reducing reliance on fossil fuels in its own community. The session members learned that simply changing a light bulb from incandescent to CFLs offsets about .4 tons of carbon per year in our community and that, in order to offset 84 tons of carbon, it needed to replace 210 light bulbs. A member donation paid for the compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs). It was decided that we were also capable of installing weather stripping, insulating

behind electric fixtures, installing lower-flow shower and kitchen sink heads, and taking other simple steps to lower energy usage.

Anderson Chapel, a non denominational church in downtown Tallahassee, agreed to sign up its members to have their homes made more energy efficient. On two Saturdays, teams went into 11 homes and made the energy modifications and have offset at least 80 tons of carbon. This is 80 tons of carbon that would continue to go into the atmosphere if they hadn't made these changes. They have also given them information on the City's energy programs, which will provide them with a free energy audit and grants up to \$10,000 for home improvements to reduce their energy usage.

First Presbyterian Church families are encouraged to calculate their personal carbon emissions and offset them by donating to a church fund so that this work can continue with our neighbors to make their homes more energy efficient. Of course, they are not just making their neighbors' homes more energy efficient; they are saving them money, making them more comfortable, and making new friends.

To read in more detail how to go carbon neutral, go to www.oldfirstchurch.org and click on "Carbon Guide" in the blue column on the left side of the page.

And here is more good news, Faith Presbyterian Church of Tallahassee has also installed 25 KWs of solar panels and taken other steps to reduce their reliance on fossil fuels. You can read more of their story at <http://www.faithpcusa.org/index.php?nid=108691&s=gl> .

If you have any questions, please contact Pam McVety, Stewardship of Creation Enabler, at mcvety@nettally.com.