



*What deeper
reflection
are we called to
in our time?
Why?*

Some things to be thankful for

By Mary Minette, ELCA director for environmental education and advocacy

*"I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving."
– Psalm 69:30*

I gave an adult forum presentation a couple of weekends ago about the federal budget, and at the end of my talk one of the audience members noted that he was a little depressed by what he had heard. He asked if I had any good news — anything to report that would give him some hope. And I did! I am currently thanking God for a couple of developments:

Earlier this month, The Lutheran Center on Higgins Road in Chicago, which houses many of the staff who work for the ELCA's churchwide ministries, received word that it had been certified as an Energy Star building by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Energy Star is a program that recognizes significant energy-saving measures. To qualify, an applicant must show energy savings over a set period of time and must receive a score of 75 or higher. The Lutheran Center achieved a score of 92, which means that the building uses 35 percent less energy and generates 35 percent fewer greenhouse gas emissions than similar buildings across the nation. The energy saved is more than just good stewardship of God's creation — it's good stewardship of financial resources in the form of lower utility bills.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, the ELCA is only the second U.S. denomination to get Energy Star certification for its headquarters building! The building's management achieved the energy savings through measures like installing more energy-efficient lighting during a building remodel several years ago and adding motion sensors for lighting in conference rooms, copy rooms and bathrooms. Building managers also added variable speed drives to

the building's HVAC system so that they can be run at lower speeds, and replaced the building's outside sign with an efficient LED version. And when the building needed a new roof, it was replaced with a more energy-efficient version.

The Lutheran Center is only the most recent ELCA structure honored with Energy Star status. In September I was invited to [a celebration at the White House](#) to honor the first 28 congregations to achieve Energy Star certification for their church buildings. Of the 28 congregations honored, four were part of the ELCA: Elim Lutheran Church in Duluth, Minn.; First English Lutheran in Columbus, Ohio; First Lutheran Church in Bothell, Wash.; and Reformation Lutheran Church in Media, Pa. [According to Sara Ward](#), a member of First English Lutheran, her congregation's energy-conservation efforts were not only a way to reduce their building costs and be good stewards of their God-given gifts, but also were a way to strive for justice for the global community by ensuring enough resources for all and for the preservation of God's creation.

The Energy Star program for congregations notes that if our country's houses of worship cut energy use by only 20 percent they could save more than \$600 million each year on their utility bills and cut their use of electricity by more than 3.6 billion kilowatt hours. At the event in September, the Environmental Protection Agency and the White House issued a challenge to congregations to increase their energy efficiency, and offered the opportunity of possible public recognition to congregations who are interested in engaging in this work.

If your congregation is already tracking and reducing your energy use, you may qualify for this recognition — [click here](#) to see what you need to do to apply.

If your congregation is considering steps to reduce your energy use, there is a program sponsored by Lutherans Restoring Creation called Energy Stewards that might be of help to you in getting started. The program is now enrolling new participants and is aimed at helping congregations to track their energy use, decide which conservation efforts to undertake. The program provides both peer and expert support over a two-year period for a nominal monthly participation fee. Find out more about the Energy Stewards program [here](#).

Please also let us know at washingtonoffice@elca.org about your story related to measuring and reducing energy in your congregation!

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