

Our Energy Conservation Journey: The Unitarian Universalist Church of Indianapolis

Per cent of households achieving the 14% goal:	48%
Average reduction by those households:	30%
Reduction in natural gas use:	47%
Reduction in electricity use:	43%

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Indianapolis (UUI) consists of four distinct buildings, built between the early 1920s and 1994, with five heating and air conditioning systems (zones). The builders did not employ modern materials, methods and strategies for conserving energy.

Our energy conservation journey began in 2000 when the Indianapolis Center for Congregations agreed to pay half the cost (\$500) of an energy audit of our church buildings. The report outlined how we could reduce our energy use. It covered standard audit areas - lights, furnaces and air conditioners, refrigerators, and temperatures over several weeks. It did not cover insulation and infiltration.

As a result of the audit, we began to seriously track our utility usage. Our spreadsheet includes monthly costs, utility consumption, and degree days, and the area of each of our buildings. Thus, we can see which buildings use the most energy per square foot and whether we are reducing our energy consumption over time. We have installed occupancy sensors in bathrooms and compact fluorescent light bulbs, and replaced T12 light fixtures with T8s. We have wrapped water heaters and tightened make up air intakes to furnaces.

In 2006 our national church body, The Unitarian Universalist Association, challenged congregations to become accredited as Green Sanctuaries. Our board and congregation voted to undertake this challenge and formed a Green Sanctuary Task Force with representatives from all areas of the church. The vote was a key step in our journey.

After two years of concentrated work we became accredited. Along the way, we shared our journey with other churches in the Indianapolis area, putting ourselves out there as an example for others to follow. This was also a key to our progress. Having taken this public stand, we needed to produce.

During this time frame we had the unplanned good - or bad! - fortune to need five new furnaces. Although we had little time to research options, we did decide to spend approximately \$1000 extra each time to get a higher efficiency furnace. This definitely helped us reduce our energy consumption.

At UUI a core of members devote hours to tending our property. When an opportunity presents itself to save energy at little cost, like tightening weather stripping around doors or windows, this group jumps on it. For one of our buildings with leaky old windows, we made custom plastic storm windows that we now keep up year round.

In 2011, an expert energy auditor, Monroe Fritz, investigated our buildings. He noted several opportunities to seal significant air leaks, leaks that exemplified the potential waste lurking in many places in our buildings. As a result, we sealed the attic space above a drop-in ceiling in our social hall as a cost of just over \$6000. To help cover the cost, we secured a Citizen's Gas Business Custom Incentive of \$572.

Throughout these efforts, we kept our congregation involved. During our quest to become Green Sanctuary accredited, one task force member focused strictly on communications. Nearly every week, we write a blurb for the church newsletter about things people can do to help the environment. Our committee works on more than energy conservation. Its purpose is to:

- 1) increase environmental stewardship in church operations;
- 2) encourage and assist church members and the neighboring community to do the same; and
- 3) educate church members, friends, and neighborhoods about environmental justice and sustainability issues, consistent with the Earth Charter, to which we are a signatory.

We have also kept the congregation involve in other ways. Two years ago we invited everyone to participate in Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light's (H-IPL) Task of the Month program. Many of our members purchase Green Power from their utility company as does our church. Our participation in the Energizing Indiana home energy audit program has earned our church over \$1000 - \$25 per audit. We remind people about our energy consumption with graphs posted in our Social Hall. Little 33% stickers on every wall switch, electrical outlet, and thermostat remind them of our goal, to reduce our electrical usage by 33%. But possibly the most prominent way we keep people engaged is the temperatures we set in our buildings.

Setting the temperature higher in the summer and lower in the winter saves energy. Our goal for when spaces are occupied is to set the summer temperature at 78 and the winter one at 68. We informed everyone of this goal and asked them to dress accordingly. We have found that 78 degrees for church services is not acceptable. Our compromise is 74 degrees during the hour of church services. However, when buildings are unoccupied we set the winter temperature at 50 degrees and the summer one at 80, with a likely goal of 85 next summer. **These temperature settings have been our most important action to conserve energy.**

In the fall of 2012, on behalf of UUI and five other congregations, Hoosier Interfaith Power & Light applied for and was awarded a \$125,000 grant for solar panels - \$25,000 per church. Now, UUI's church roof sports a 10KW that further reduces our carbon footprint. Five years ago, none of us even dreamed of this. Now two of us also have solar panels on our homes and two more will soon.

The grant required us to reduce our church's energy consumption by at least 25% from our base year - 2008. As of July 2013, we had reduced our natural gas consumption by 43% and our electricity by 22%. We know we can reduce by much more. Another grant requirement is to get at least a third of our congregants to reduce their energy consumption at home by one seventh. Nearly half of our members met the goal - reducing by an average of 30%.

Our church's energy conservation journey has been a defining opportunity. It has changed our culture: in the charter of every church committee is the phrase, "Integrate UUI's commitment to environmental sustainability in all actions, activities, and decisions." It has given us a reputation as the environmentally-friendly church. It has helped us live our values - one of the seven Unitarian Universalist principles is "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." It lets us be the example we want to be for our children. It has saved us money. It has reduced waste. It has helped us learn things. It is helping to save the Earth!



UUI celebrating its energy achievements!