



10 Ways One Parish Is Going Green and Saving Money

By Zoey Di Mauro, Staff Writer, [The Catholic Standard](#)

Father Peter Daly, pastor of St. John Vianney Parish in Prince Frederick, has found that caring for creation is not only an important part of a living faith, but going green often saves the church money in the long run. “A lot of people think environmentalism is about feeling warm and fuzzy about the environment; it’s about actually looking at the hard facts of our energy consumption and realizing there’s a better way to do this,” he explained. Here are a few of the initiatives St. John Vianney has started:

1. Hitting the trail

Parishioners at [St. John Vianney](#) who want to appreciate God’s creation go no further than their church parking lot: the trailhead of a six-mile path which runs through their forest land and out to the Chesapeake Bay, said Father Daly. They save property tax money and preserve their woods by setting aside the land as part of their forest conservation plan.

The Calvert County parish has also sold 16 acres of their unused forest land to the [American Chestnut Land Trust](#), preserving it forever in its natural state, said Father Daly.

2. Getting a green audit

After having a professional look over the property, the parish made several changes, said Father Daly, like motion sensor lights, a tankless hot water heater, and a rain sensor for the sprinkler system, so that they wouldn’t needlessly water the athletic fields. They also have gradually switched to natural gas, which burns very cleanly, said Father Daly. Though getting the gas line to their property was expensive, the switch has saved them thousands of dollars in heating bills. Other changes, like new and better insulated windows, also cut costs, he said. Though still in the early stages of planning, his eventual goal for the church is to be powered by solar panels.

3. Adjust the thermostat

Father Daly and the parish staff try to keep the building temperature in the summer cold but not freezing, because even a few degrees can make a big cost and energy difference, he said. Large gathering rooms that are used on less than a daily basis have buttons on the thermostat that heat or cool the room for intervals of three hours, so that energy isn’t needlessly wasted, said Father Daly.

4. Involve the animal kingdom

Like many large properties, St. John Vianney Parish has a storm water management pond (pictured below), which helps slow the flow of rainwater into the Chesapeake Bay and prevents downstream erosion. However, as the summer starts, brush and other plants often start to overrun the area. Instead of hiring people to cut back the growth, Father Daly thought that goats could do the job. A parishioner with goats loans them to the parish until it’s too cold for them to live outdoors, said Father Daly.

In another effort to help preserve the health of the bay, they’ve decided to use fertilizer only once a year. “[From] all of that runoff, nitrogen fertilizer that goes into the bay, then it creates algae blooms,” killing sea life, he explained. “These are all connected, and it’s all our moral obligation not to destroy the earth.”



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5. Don't forget recycling!

Bins are all around their seven-building property for people to toss recyclables, said Father Daly. Besides paper, cardboard and plastic, the church collects aluminum cans and then sells them, giving the proceeds to Habitat for Humanity. Even non-Catholic members of the community will come and donate their cans, said Father Daly. They also recycle large metal, like “a junky old pick up truck, [and] a scissor lift,” he said, which makes sense economically as well. “You can get a lot of money for this stuff.”

6. Get rid of Styrofoam

The problem with Styrofoam, explains Father Daly, is that it gets into the landfill and it doesn't decay. So instead, they've started using coated paper cups, and for smaller church meetings, regular, washable mugs. “If Starbucks can live without Styrofoam, so can we,” he said.

7. Leave helpful reminders so that other can do their part.

“Last one out turn off the lights.”

8. Replace florescent light with LEDs, inside and out.

LED lighting uses less energy, is a more continuous light, and the bulbs only need to be replaced every 10 years, said Father Daly, noting that the parish saves money on energy costs and labor for replacing the lights. They also emit less heat and do not contain mercury vapor, he added.

9. Try composting

Things like coffee grounds are used for compost at the parish, said Father Daly, who noted that composting can be done for all kinds of organic trash to create natural fertilizer.

10. It's not easy being green

Learning about how to live an environmentally conscious life “is a constant reeducation,” Father Daly commented, and often that change comes with it is hard and complicated. “There are no problem-free solutions,” he said. But committing to that change is important and worthwhile, he added.

“Churches are big consumers of power, churches and schools... and this is the reason we're doing it, from a moral, spiritual, pastoral perspective, we have an obligation not to defile the earth. We are stewards of God's creation. And we have to leave the next generation a creation that is worth living in. This isn't just about economics, although it does have an economic side to it, it's about morality.... I would like the people who come 100 years from now to have some trees around,” he said.

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