**Churches Get Money to Go Green**

By Marilyn Howe, Board of Trustees Chair

If your congregation wants to take advantage of the new federal grants and subsidies to make your building more energy efficient, get ready now! Guidelines for participation in federal programs could be announced as early as the end of March.

The Inflation Reduction Act passed in 2022 included a “direct pay” option to help churches and other non-profit organizations to make upgrades to their buildings. Previous government programs used tax credits that made it difficult for churches to participate in this type of initiative.

The subsidies will come in the form of grants and could provide 30 percent of the total cost of a installing a solar, wind, geothermal or other qualifying HVAC system replacements. The Department of Energy is in charge of the program, and it is expected to publish its Non-Profit Materials Program Grant Guidelines at the end of March or during the month of April.

Interfaith Power and Light (IPL), the ecumenical non-profit that is helping congregations across the county become more energy efficient as a matter of good stewardship of our planet, has been monitoring the development of this program.

IPL maintains a detailed webpage describing the new federal program that also has links for webinars and other sources of information at:

<https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/federal-funding-for-energy-work-at-houses-of-worship/>

At a recent IPL-sponsored webinar, speakers urged congregations to compile one year of energy consumption information for their building because they anticipate this data will be needed to benchmark progress for some programs. It will also be very helpful in showing members of congregations that renovations were a good investment.

Two free online tools are available to help compile this data. The Environmental Protection Agency’s Energy Star program provides “Portfolio Manager” which is considered the best tool for this purpose. Portfolio Manager compares buildings of various sizes and uses to their peers locally by using Zip Codes and weather data. It provides metrics for energy and water use, estimated greenhouse gas emissions and other data.

 Access it at this link:

<https://www.energystar.gov/buildings/benchmark?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=3e204e7e-dec4-4b38-a9ca-811764647eed>

The EPA also has a helpful guide to energy savings designed for religious congregations. It can be downloaded for free at this site:

<https://www.coolcongregations.org/download-epa-energy-star-action-workbook-for-congregations/>

IPL also provides a tool for establishing a benchmark called the “Cool Congregations Calculator.” It is simpler to use than the Energy Star option and has graphics specifically designed for distribution to church members. It can be accessed at this link:

<https://www.coolcongregations.org/?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=3e204e7e-dec4-4b38-a9ca-811764647eed>

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