

## Environmental Tithing

*We challenge ourselves, particularly the economically secure, to tithe environmentally. Tithers would reduce their burden on the earth's bounty by producing ten percent less in waste, consuming ten percent less in non-renewable resources, and contributing the savings to earthcare efforts. Environmental tithing also entails giving time to learn about environmental problems and to work with others toward solutions.* from Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice, a social statement of the ELCA, 1993.

While adopted more than 20 years ago, the ELCA social statement, Caring for Creation, still speaks relevantly to our lives as individuals and congregations. As leaders in your congregation prepare ministry plans and budgets for 2015, encourage them to propose concrete steps toward “environmental tithing.” Conducting an energy audit to identify easy and inexpensive upgrades to make your buildings more efficient is a great way to begin. Such upgrades might include swapping out old exit signs for new LED ones, changing incandescent bulbs to CFLs, and installing programmable thermostats. While congregations making deliberate efforts toward energy efficiency can expect savings of up to 35% and even as high as 68% (Faith, Saginaw), a reasonable, achievable goal would be 10%, even in the first year of such efforts. Even our little steps like using CFL’s are witnesses to the vision, hope, and justice God promises.

Now in my new life as bishop emeritus, I serve on the board of Michigan Interfaith Power and Light, a grassroots organization that promotes practical ways for congregations and individuals to exercise their call to earthkeeping. With our bishop’s support, I hope to give time in the months ahead to encouraging you to “plant apple trees” (words attributed to Luther) in the face of mounting evidence that the Earth is at ever greater risk of environmental collapse.

I encourage you to visit the ELCA website, exploring the Caring for Creation resources. I also encourage you to look at the Michigan IPL website, which offers a number of very accessible ways to achieve energy efficiency and sustainability, including resources that will help you conduct energy audits at home and at your church. On this latter virtue, I think how wonderful it would be if our congregations saved 10% on their energy costs, what good stewardship that tithe would represent, what significant resources that might release for works of love and justice.

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