

How parishes can go “green” and save money

I read with great interest Father Peter Daly’s article “Rising gas prices fuel faith, encourage greener parishes” (CR, June 26). Father Daly’s main point is that people have to change their behavioral patterns, because there is no relief from pain-at-the-pump forthcoming.

One extremely important first step that Father Daly mentions is that his parish had an energy audit done. That is the most neglected “source” of energy in the world. There are tens of millions of households that have never done anything resembling an energy audit, and probably a million businesses, too. I’d guess that less than 1 percent of all the churches in America have been energy-audited.

The savings to be had via saving energy are gigantic. Here’s one example: after suffering many blackouts in 2000 and 2001, the people of California got serious about energy conservation, changed their behavioral patterns, and cut their energy demand 15 percent in about a year; they haven’t had a blackout since.

Church and parish buildings will become drafty, allowing little streams of air to slip around windows and doors; air needs to be circulated beneath those big high ceilings; filters in A/C vents get clogged; insulation deteriorates around hot water heaters and kitchen facilities; and so on and on. A parish can save thousands of dollars by carefully examining energy usage (an energy audit) and then fixing up things that have been ignored for quite a while.

A parishioner-volunteer army carrying caulking guns can seriously aid a parish’s finances. Remember, the cheapest energy of all is the nega-watt – the energy you don’t use in the first place.

Also, one minor caution: don’t get diverted by feel-good trivialities that have no real numerical meaning. When the volunteers come to work, give them a cup of coffee or a bottle of Gatorade and don’t skimp on the Styrofoam cups. All the Styrofoam and plastic bottles in America doesn’t add up to one hour’s worth of oil imports. A

parish's "green committee" should include members with good numerical common sense who can attend to the real links between energy and cost.

Way back in 1975, The National Bureau of Standards issued a simple pamphlet entitled "In the Bank or Up the Chimney." It was a guidebook with fill-in-the-blank calculations that enabled anyone to discern quickly how to get the best bang for the buck on energy-conserving expenditures. It's too bad there was never a church-version of that written; but the principles are still the same today, and there is a lot of energy to be saved by following them.