



The Rev. Pattie Handloss, associate vicar of the Old North Church, and Steve MacAusland, cofounder of Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light, stood in the steeple Saturday where energy-efficient bulbs have taken the place of conventional lanterns. (Globe Staff Photo / Essdras M. Suarez)

Energy group holds light ceremony at church

By Peter Schworm, Globe Staff | April 25, 2005

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On an April night in 1775, two lanterns in the Old North Church were lit to warn the Colonial militia that the British were coming, a symbol of defiance that sparked the Revolutionary War. This month, the church installed energy-efficient light bulbs in the famed steeple to urge other congregations to become more environmentally conscious.

Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light, a group working to reduce energy consumption in houses of worship, held a ceremony at the church last evening to mark the installation of compact fluorescent bulbs, which organizers said would cut energy consumption and environmentally harmful power-generating emissions by 75 percent.

"This is just one small step, but it's a fairly significant symbol of our cause," Steve MacAusland, the group's cofounder said in a telephone interview before yesterday's event. Clean electricity that generates no emissions will power the lights, he said. Compact fluorescent light bulbs use about one-fourth the energy of regular bulbs and last about 10 times longer while generating a comparable amount of light, he said.

The nonprofit group, created five years ago, includes 80 congregations across the state that have taken steps to promote cleaner energy in their buildings in an effort to reduce their environmental impact. MacAusland said he hoped that a historical church's willingness to adopt environmental measures would advance the group's cause.

The group honored Mayor Thomas M. Menino of Boston and state Senator Jarrett T. Barrios, a Cambridge Democrat, at the event for their leadership on environmental issues. The group's fourth-annual event also observed Earth Day, which was Friday.

About 25 people gathered for yesterday's ceremony to light the lanterns at 6 p.m. "It's to symbolize a new revolution in energy conservation," the Rev. Stephen Ayres said.

Ayres told the group that continuing current energy policies risks depleting natural resources and increasing entanglements in foreign conflicts. "Without a serious commitment to energy conservation, we

risk our hard won freedoms," he said.

Ayres said he hoped that the church's status would publicize the cause. James W. Hunt III, chief of Environmental and Energy Services for Menino, said the city is embarking on a range of environmental initiatives that should save money and improve air quality and "reduce dependence on fossil fuel."

Hunt praised the church's effort and said it showed a commitment to the environment.

Churches tend to be large, old buildings that waste a lot of energy, and investing in energy-efficient technology can save money and help preserve natural resources, MacAusland said.

There are similar "environmental ministry" campaigns in 17 other states, giving parishioners a chance to put their belief in responsible environmental stewardship into practice.

People of faith are called upon to make "just and proper use of creation" he said. "Here's an opportunity."

MacAusland, 55, said his group preaches that energy improvements are practical as well as ethical. Churches can save thousands of dollars in lower energy costs by investing in upgrades. St. Paul's Church in Dedham, which MacAusland attends, cut its heating bills by 35 percent by replacing "cranky old boilers" with newer models and adding installation and storm windows.

"Our sermon in a nutshell is 'save energy, save money, and save the planet,' " he said. ■

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