

Praying for better efficiency

By Laura Crimaldi | Sunday, August 10, 2008 | <http://www.bostonherald.com> | Local Coverage

For many religious congregations, the mysteries of the scripture are nothing compared to the mysteries of the furnace. So they turn to a higher power.

Thomas E. Nutt-Powell, president and co-founder of Massachusetts Interfaith Power & Light, travels across the state to help congregations decrease their energy use, make their buildings more efficient and find ways to save on energy bills.

"With the various clergy, they say, 'I just can't understand the boiler,' " said Nutt-Powell, an urban planner and member of All Saints Episcopal Parish in Brookline. "You expect me to understand the Resurrection and you can't understand the boiler?"

Among MIP&L's clients is St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Lynn.

"We realized that we were just heating the world, apparently, with greenhouse emissions and letting heat go out the windows," said Chris Trahan, a lifelong member and former senior warden at the Lynn church.

MIP&L prepared an Environmental Stewardship Assessment for the 19th century church several years ago. The report revealed major energy wasters, such as an inability to heat the rector's office without also sending heat into a sanctuary with 60- to 70-foot ceilings and Tiffany stained-glass windows in steel casings.

Now, zones have been set up to keep the sanctuary and office heating separate. The church is buying some of its electricity from renewable sources and has installed energy-efficient lighting.

St. James Episcopal Church in Cambridge called in MIP&L when its oil burners were on the edge of dying last year.

"For us, they played a very instrumental role initiating the concern, so that the parish feels that there's an independent source confirming the need for the investment," said Peter Merrell, who is a member of the vestry.

The church raised about \$200,000 to switch to a three-boiler system that heats the sanctuary and parish hall on a rotating basis to minimize equipment wear and tear.

"Churches tend to be one of the greatest offenders for efficiency," Merrell said. "There's a lot of reasons for that, given cost restraints."

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