

Practical suggestions to help parishes save energy and money

With escalating energy bills, common sense tells us it's a good idea to shut doors and turn the heating down a notch. But there are many other cheap or free things that parishes can do to reduce their energy usage, and in turn their bills and carbon footprint. And reduced usage this year can feed into lower standing charges next year, so a win all round.

This document has been created by the Cathedral and Church Buildings Division, drawing extensively on existing work from Oxford Diocese, and with contributions from the Church Energy Advisors Network and attendees at the 2022 DAC conference.

You might like to take it to your PCC to see if there's anything you're missing that would help you reduce your energy consumption this winter.

You can access National Guidance on Energy Efficiency below.



Check your bills

Scrutinise a winter energy bill to make sure that you are not paying more than 5% VAT. Most churches should pay only 5% and they should not pay the Climate Change Levy (CCL).

Exceptions to this rule are churches which hire their premises out commercially. If in doubt, contact your energy supplier.

Check that any Feed in Tariff (FiT) on your bill is correct.

A dual rate electricity tariff can be an advantage, but check that your meter shows the correct time and date. They can slip out of time over the years, and your billing can go awry.



Monitor what you use

It's much easier to monitor savings if you're clear on what you're using in the first place. Regularly check your readings as it's an easy way of seeing if something is being left on overnight, or when the church is empty.

Smart Meters can provide detailed information on usage and you can speak to your energy company if you don't yet have one.

Completing the Church of England Energy Footprint Tool helps you see your usage compared to other, similar churches.



Maintain your heaters



Most heaters use the same amount of energy whether they are working at full efficiency or not, so make sure yours are performing as well as they can:

Gently dust/vacuum fan convector heater fins and grills to optimise efficiency.

Make sure that radiators can function properly – bleed them if they are cold at the top, and have the sludge flushed out if they are cold at the bottom.

Keep furniture or other obstructions clear of radiators.

If radiators are next to walls, consider putting insulating foil between them and the walls.

Fix broken windows (even tiny breakages).*

Put fridge magnets over large open keyholes. (There are specialist products that perform this function too.)

Consider hanging curtains or placing a portable screen around doorways.

If needed, and in smaller spaces such as meeting rooms or offices, try a dehumidifier to control damp, rather than heating.

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In the drive to make the building airtight, don't block air bricks or other intentional ventilation, and remember some windows may need to be open during a service to let condensation out.

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Have a purge on drafts



*Those actions marked * may require permissions, so check against the latest List A and List B (pg 55 onwards) with your archdeacon or DAC first.*

Make the building watertight

Damp means cold, so it's important to keep water in its place over the winter.

Clear gutters to prevent damp problems.

Mend leaks* and fix leaking taps.

Insulate heating pipes and water tanks.*

To find tradespeople to maintain your church, register with Maintenance Booker through Parish Buying. You can then search for quotes from nationally approved suppliers. There are also details of grants available to help churches in this ongoing task.

Maintenance Booker



Use water wisely

Water companies often provide free water saving gadgets which reduce waste and therefore bills. Speak to yours and see what they offer. Gadgets can also be bought in hardware stores or online.

Don't overfill urns and kettles – it not only wastes water, but fuel in heating them up.

Where possible, check water temperatures are not higher than they need to be.

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Control the heating

Experiment with your thermostat settings to see if a degree or two lower makes a significant difference to people's comfort.

Ensure thermostats are tamper proof or located where the public cannot access them.

If there are different heating circuits for different parts of the building, make sure that empty rooms are not being heated. Keep the doors to unheated areas closed.

If it's all on the same system, you could consider thermostatic valves on radiators.

Check the frost setting on your boiler or thermostat, if you have one, and set it correctly. There's guidance on how to do this here.



If you have a dual burner, the high-flame setting should be set lower than the low-flame setting (see webinar with the relevant part starting at 16 minutes).

If you have Drugasar, Temcana or similar heaters, check whether they have pilot lights. If they do, then you can turn them off at the end of the heating season and on before the start of the next. The turning on should be carried out by a competent person, such as a Gas Safe Engineer to ensure the correct components are operating.

Watch the webinar



Set the timer

Check that the heating timings suit your current service times. Amend them when the clocks change. Many churches find they can turn the heating off 30-45 minutes before the end of the service and still maintain comfort, because of the residual heat in the radiators.

Add timers to heaters so they can't be left on by mistake.

If you are providing background heating when the church is empty, and unless the fabric, fixtures and/or fittings require it, turn it down or off. Monitor for ill-effects such as mould.

Where it's possible, plan for activities to take place back to back on fewer days, meaning that the building has to be heated from scratch less often.

Could service times be adjusted in winter, happening later in the morning or early afternoon, when the solar gain through the windows has had effect?



Heat the people (not the space!)

Scan the QR code below
to go to the heating page



Scan the QR code to
read the case study



Scan the QR code below
to go to the webinar



It's worth thinking about how to keep people warm without heating the whole building.

As we all know, warm air rises and nowhere is this more problematic than in churches with their high ceilings. As we are less able to afford to keep the bats cosy at the expense of the congregation, direct heating solutions are becoming more popular so that instead of heating all the air in the building, people sit on something that's warm like a heated cushion, blanket or pew heater.

The heating page of Parish Buying is being updated all the time as trials of different solutions are completed, while the Environment section of the Church of England website has an interesting case study. Although direct heating may not be suitable for a Sunday service with 150 people, they can be a great money-saver as a top up to space heating or for smaller meetings and services.

If you want to research the subject more thoroughly, there's a webinar which covers different ways of heating a church using electricity rather than gas. Several of the ways outlined relate specifically to directly heating people, rather than the wider space.

A photograph of a Gothic cathedral interior, showing high vaulted ceilings, intricate stone tracery, and large stained glass windows. Sunlight streams through the windows, creating a hazy, ethereal atmosphere. The architecture is detailed with pointed arches and ribbed vaulting.

Everyone can help

There are ways people can change their own behaviour to be warmer:

Encourage people to sit away from walls, doors and other draughts.

Suggest people sit closer together, so that their natural warmth is shared.

Consider whether the Welcome team could keep the outside door closed more of the time. This can work well if the team stands outside the door (ie on the street side) and opens it for people going in. A hot water bottle or chair with a heated cushion can ensure the comfort of the welcomers!

Appoint volunteer champions to remind people (gently) to save energy.

Create VERY clear instructions for groups hiring the church.

Look at the lighting

Check how light the building is before turning the lights on – obvious, but it's surprising how we can get into the habit of flicking all the switches every time.

If your church is open to visitors, consider motion-operated lights that only come on when someone's there.

Put signs next to lights, asking people to switch them off when leaving.

Consider whether all parts of the church need to be lit for the current number of hours.

Think about reducing the hours/days your floodlighting runs for. Consult your community, who may be happy when they understand the need. Some churches turn floodlights off entirely except for special events / holidays.

Use dimmers if you have them. If lighting is LED, ensure that the correct type of dimmer is being used.

Switch bulbs to LED alternatives where possible, using a reputable brand. LEDs use up to 90% less energy. Start with simple bulb to LED lamp switches. More complicated lighting may require outside help.

See the CofE webinar LED lighting here:



Get the best tariff



Scan the QR code below for more information



While there are unlikely to be any bargain energy tariffs on the market, it's still helpful to minimise energy costs as much as possible and that's especially true for anyone who's on an out of contract rate. Parish Buying is working with a UK-based energy platform to provide customers with fixed term energy contract options.

The platform gives access to pricing from a large number of energy suppliers and enables them to offer churches competitive prices for 1, 2 and 3 year fixed term contracts.

The Energy Basket uses the bulk buying power of the Church to obtain competitive prices for your gas and electricity. It runs from 1 October every year, but you can get in touch with Parish Buying if you want to join in 2023.

Look at the Energy Basket pages for more information.

Appliances matter

Make sure you turn off computers, printers, copiers etc when not in use. Just one TV left on standby every night will cost around £25 a year.

If it has one, use your dishwasher's 'eco' setting, which will use less electricity and water.

Budget for energy efficient appliances when your current appliances need replacing. Energy labels have changed on many items; look for a rating of C or higher. (Energy labels for ovens, tumble dryers, air conditioners, space and water heaters have not yet been updated so you're still looking for A+ and above.)

Check that fridges and freezers do not need defrosting, and turn them off if they're empty. Dust the grilles on the back of fridges and freezers for maximum efficiency





If needed, consider alternative venues

You may want to consider moving worship, meetings, and/or other activities into a smaller part of the church which is easier to heat, and where local heating is more effective, such as the chancel or the Lady chapel.

Some activities, such as PCC meetings and toddler groups, might be able to move to an alternative venue such as a school hall.

Live-streaming services held in the church may be a way to allow more vulnerable people to participate throughout the winter.

Some parishes may reach the point where they need to consider moving worship out of the church entirely during the coldest days of winter. There are significant legal, missional and policy implications to this, and other guidance covers this.



For more help and information around Energy bills, check
Heating your church this winter | The Church of England

Scan the QR code below
to go straight there

