

# Consider becoming a ‘Certified Cool Congregation’

by Donna Rasmussen, Member of the Care for Creation Network

Iowa Interfaith Power and Light: Cool Congregations (<https://iowaipl.org/resources/#cool>)

Cool Congregations was developed at Iowa Interfaith Power and Light (IPL) and is now at a national level. This program works with faith communities to reduce carbon emissions from their facilities and engages their members in reducing their carbon footprint at home.

Becoming a Certified Cool Congregation is a wonderful way for faith communities to save money on energy bills, respond to climate change, and have more money to spend on their missions. A Certified Cool Congregation is a congregation or place of worship of any faith that cuts its carbon footprint by at least 10%. Four levels of recognition are available for 10%, 20%, 30%, and 40% carbon footprint reduction. Congregations can achieve higher and higher levels of certification with each passing year. Data are gathered to find the carbon base line, then that can be compared to future situations. There is a no fee to apply for certification.

St. John Lutheran, Cedar Falls, was recognized for their work engaging congregants and communities in 2012. Following is their description of the activities they implemented (reprinted from the IIPPL website). For more information about their efforts at St. John, contact Linda Holm at [lbholm@cfu.net](mailto:lbholm@cfu.net).

Our Cool Congregations Green Team at St. John Lutheran has had several opportunities to inform our congregation members of ways to “go green”. We have put informational displays in our



church atrium this past year based on a seasonal calendar. In October, we had a Halloween-themed display about becoming a “vampire slayer” by eliminating Vampire Power.

In January we celebrated our second year of certification by GCVI (Green Cedar Valley Initiative) for being proactive about our church building’s care for creation. We installed foam gaskets behind all switch plates and outlet covers in the building. We also implemented a computer-controlled zonal space conditioning system, which allows us to heat/cool various parts of the building based on their occupancy during various times of the day/week.

In March we set up a St. Patty’s Day themed display about conserving water (one of the main components of green beer!!) and in May we had an Earth Day / Green Spring Cleaning display. Our entry for the IPL Contest is about our efforts to encourage Green Spring Cleaning. We dressed up a mannequin in a

sweatshirt, jeans and apron to simulate cleaning clothes, and placed the “Headless House Cleaner” in a prominent place in the church atrium. We arranged cleaning items such as rubber gloves, sponge, mop & bucket, refillable spray bottle and reusable cleaning cloths on or near the mannequin. There were “recipes” for common household cleaners such as window cleaner, oven cleaner, and furniture polish on a poster.

Safe, eco-friendly and inexpensive cleaning ingredients such as lemon juice, baking soda, vinegar, dish soap and newspapers were displayed along with these recipes. And knowing that part of Green Cleaning is to reduce, reuse and recycle, we also provided a list of local organizations that would take items that otherwise would be headed for the landfill (for example, items such as used towels are desired by the Humane Society, children’s art programs can use magazines, pie pans and yogurt cups – even freezer-burned meat has a use when donated to our local wildlife rehabilitation agency).

We try to encourage our congregation to make choices that Care for God’s Creation, but we also emphasize the economics of living a green lifestyle. For congregation members that are unemployed or on fixed incomes, it’s good to know that “going green” can mean not only sound environmental choices, but these choices can also keep some “green” in their pockets, too.