

St. James Carp.

Greening: a long-term commitment.

By Beatrice Ekwa Ekoko, Greening Sacred Spaces Representative, Hamilton Region

St. James the Apostle Church (1889) is forward thinking. They were quick enough to see the opportunity in the Ontario Power Authority's MicroFit program (a 20 year contract with the government, selling energy back to the grid) and are now enjoying the return on investments from their 10kW rooftop solar project.

Reverend Monique Stone feels almost guilty at the success of the project: "We thought we would need 11 years to pay off the panels but it looks like we only have 3 left."

Although arriving at the church when the planning around the solar project had already occurred, the parish (one of three churches built in Huntley Parish Carp, Ontario) was very blessed to have gained a priest who in her past life, specialized in citizen and stakeholder engagement in the environmental sustainability sector.

Stone points out the absence of a 'cheering committee' of sorts—to make some noise about the solar project—interestingly, this was an aside observation that came out of the Greening Sacred Spaces, Green Audit in November 2013. "We don't think about the solar panels—it's not a big deal—just part of our church," she remarks. She was pleasantly surprised that the auditor emphasized how they should be talking more about the project, putting it out there: "When he was presenting the audit he was advocating for our leadership role as stewards. It's not something I expected of an audit!"

Being stewards and caring for creation because that's what Christians are called to do, is something that is on Stone's mind quite a bit: Who is doing sustainability as 'Creation Theology' and who is doing it as a means to reduce costs? "In the world of churches in today's society many of us swim in the waters of reducing costs. Yes, it has made an impact—we have a good group of people that are seeing the impact of sustainability—financial first, creation second. We probably need to reverse the order!"

How is Stone addressing this concern? She is incorporating issues of creation care into elements of liturgy. As well, the audit serves as a launching pad, energizing and pulling together a group of people who are tackling its recommendations. They're looking into naming themselves something other than the 'green team,' "because some people baulk away from that description," Stone admits. It will likely be something like 'Sustainability and Creation group.'

Completing audits for *all* 3 buildings in their parish (the other two are Christ Church, 1838 and St John's 1885) as well as the main parish hall has been a top priority of theirs—even before the opportunity to apply for the Green Audit occurred. When that opportunity came up two parishioners jumped on it to start the process.

Stone was able to attend parts of the walkthrough audit (two others accompanied the auditor and congregants were able to participate as well). "Overall, it was incredibly well received, very thorough," Stone enthuses.

Stone points out that what was particularly helpful, especially for people who aren't well versed in audit 'lingo,' was the infrared camera: "To see the pictures of the heat escaping out, it was so tangible!" she explains. "We learned that we had more challenges than we originally thought," referring to mould issues, which is common of older churches. "We hadn't consciously thought about the expanse of the physical issues we need to explore."

An unexpected challenge to the actual audit itself came from nature: they were unable to get into the basement because of too much snow!

Keeping it real: A longer-term commitment.

“One of the benefits to the audit is that it’s done in a way that there are some low hanging fruit,” Stone says appreciatively. For example, they have put in programmable thermostats, lighting etc. “I don’t know that we can do everything in the audit, but I do know we can do some of it.”

Commenting on how the audit itself might be improved, Stone points out that it would be a good idea to keep in mind the liturgical realities of our communities.

“The audit has an unrealistic turn-around,” she reflects. “I see implementation happening over years, not over months.” The issue is that the audit ‘to do list’ is one of many things on their busy agenda. “I want people to participate in the seasons of the church!” she laughs.

Continuing along this line of thought, Stone suggests including in the audit process, a tool for evaluation over the next five years after the initial report that can be used by Parish Councils to extend the importance of the audit and its recommendations

What’s next?

“The audit was like an awakening. We actually have to *do* something about it!” Stone remarks. As the group starts to unpack the audit, they will be thinking about how best to use the income from the dollars invested in solar to finance infrastructure and move the recommendation from the audit forward. How can they be more holistic and encompass these ideas to include other groups (such as the Girl Guides) that make use of their building?

The team will be exploring innovative opportunities to link the ‘bigger picture’ audit findings to furthering and enhancing a variety of mission work. That should pose no problem for Stone whose proven track record of engaging communities includes initiating a Eucharist based on *The Hunger Games* (a youth book series now turned into films) to examine justice issues and analogies between the power of privilege and oppressive structures, and theological connections. Hosted in the ‘Diefenbunker’ (the once-secret underground bunker near Carp, built more than 50 years ago to protect the Canadian government from nuclear attack) the challenge was to create a spiritual space out of the product of war. It brought many youth together from across the diocese.

The parish also has a particular focus on food justice and food sustainability and they have a community garden on their property in partnership with a few non-profits.

“I think we are called to reclaim our role as community enablers and respond to the needs of community,” Stone concludes. “175 years ago, the church saw itself as instigators of community schools, social supports and the fabric of life. Sometimes it seems that we (as the larger ‘church’) have now become so focused on keeping our buildings alive that we forget the role that we have had throughout history of creating sustainable communities.”

