



SUMMARY: EcoFaith Summit "Renewing Energy: People, Planet, and Promise"

March 17, 2018, 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Grand Rapids, MN

Sponsored by the EcoFaith Network, NE MN Synod/ELCA

Approximately 45 people representing congregations around the NE MN Synod attended the one day EcoFaith Summit to explore our role as individuals and congregations in promoting the use of renewable energy, its value to the health of our planet, and how God's faithful promise of redemption of all creation has the power to inspire and renew our purpose as stewards of the earth.

Welcome

Rev. Kristin Foster, co-chair of the EcoFaith Network, welcomed participants and emphasized our role as Christians in caring for God's creation. "Caring for creation is not a political issue, it is a theological responsibility."

"The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it. "

Psalm 24:1

God of Earth: A Theological Basis for Using Renewable Energy

Retired pastor John Hanson shared excerpts from the book "God of Earth: Jesus Reconciling All Things to Earth, Now and Forever" by Kristen Swenson to set a theological framework for the renewable energy summit. He pointed out her book raises the question of God sending Jesus into the world to reconcile all of creation, human and non-human, to God's loving care. In her book, Swenson used the liturgical year, Advent through Pentecost, to help Christians understand and see the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, as creator and redeemer of the whole cosmos. For instance, to view the Christ child in this way: "...the attention, love, and care the baby Jesus draws forth from us by his very nature as a poor infant is the same as earth's – to attend, care, to take delight and to worry over the earth is to worship the newborn God." The God of earth calls us to honor, love, and care for the creation given to us. The Christian faith therefore, is to be lived by caring for this world as we trust in God's redemption in Christ in the world to come. We are called to invest in and use renewable energy as God daily engages in blessing and renewing the creation. Noting that science and religion are not mutually exclusive—rather integrated nicely, Pastor Hanson quoted Barbara Kingsolver as a scientist and noted author who thinks it wise to enter the doors of creation with the same reverence as entering a traditional place of worship.

Keynote Address: Renewing Our Power

J. Drake Hamilton, Science Policy Director for Fresh Energy and nationally recognized expert in climate and energy policy, gave an engaging presentation on the clean energy revolution in Minnesota emphasizing the rapidly declining costs and benefits of wind and solar technologies and the thousands of clean energy jobs being created in rural Minnesota communities. She pointed out that energy conservation and efficiency is the crucial bedrock for keeping energy prices low and making renewable energy possible; it's easy and it's the cheapest and fastest place for everyone to start taking responsibility for reducing Minnesota's carbon emissions.



J. Drake Hamilton noted Minnesota is a hotbed of civic engagement around many environmental issues, including renewable energy where Minnesota is:

- Close to achieving a clean energy revolution without legislation,
- Leading the nation in growth of renewable energy resources and de-carbonization, and
- A corporate leader in establishing renewable energy solutions to climate change because it's the best and most economical thing they can do.

With bipartisan support, the Minnesota legislature passed the Next Generation Energy Act in 2007 that established: 1) a 25% renewable energy standard by 2025; 2) a statewide goal to cut greenhouse gases by at least 30% below 2005 levels by 2025 and 80% below 2005 levels by 2050 across the economy; and 3) a 1.5% energy savings standard for electric utilities.

Minnesota's growth in renewable energy has led to 57,000 new clean energy jobs (a 78% growth) since 2000—jobs that exceed the state average wage by 42%. Approximately 30% of the jobs are in Greater Minnesota. The Solar Energy Jobs Act of 2013 set a new standard of 1.5% of public utilities electricity from solar by 2020; a goal of 10% of the entire state's electricity from solar by 2030; and paved the way for community solar gardens. Carbon emissions are being cut via smart, bipartisan policies and business leadership. For example, General Mills required every supplier to achieve 27% carbon reduction by 2025 and committed \$100 million investment to energy efficiency and renewable resources. Xcel Energy's business decision to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 60% by 2030 will be achieved 8 years early.

J. pointed out that Minnesota is already meeting its goals for the near future. Just in 2017, solar costs dropped 30% in one year and Minnesota added enough solar electricity production to power 53,000 homes. Production of energy from burning coal has been dramatically reduced. Energy production in Minnesota in 2007 was 62% from coal and 7% from renewables; in 2017 25% of total energy production was from renewable energy resources and coal production fell to below 39%. The projected mix for 2030 is 45% renewables and 22% coal. Twelve (12) coal plant retirements have been secured which will be the equivalent of taking 2.4 million cars and their pollution off Minnesota's roads.

But there is still much to be done. Eighty (80) percent of Minnesotans have roofs suitable for solar installations. For those whose roofs are not suitable, investment in Community Solar Gardens is the answer. Minnesota needs to double its renewable energy standard. Fortunately, there is strong public support for Minnesota meeting more of its energy demand from renewable energy sources. J. reported on a survey that showed seven in ten Minnesotans favor increasing the state's goal of producing energy from renewable sources (like wind and solar) to 50%. J. Drake Hamilton left the audience with a profound sense of hope that Minnesota will be a big part of the solutions necessary to reduce world-wide carbon emissions to help stem the now growing and devastating impacts of climate change.

View J. Drake Hamilton's slides from her presentation for more detail.

Advocacy for Renewable Energy

Tammy Walhof, director of Lutheran Advocacy/Minnesota, told participants that their contact with legislators does make a difference in setting policy to support the use of renewable energy resources. She encouraged participants to write a letter, call, or visit their legislators. She also suggested writing letters to the editor of the local newspaper and using social media to get out a message of importance about renewable energy. After offering a number of statistics and reasons that can be used for political persuasion, participants wrote postcards to their legislator(s); the postcards were blessed in the closing service and sent.

Synod Projects and Programs for “Going Green to Save Green”

Building on J. Drake Hamilton’s tenet that saving energy is the bedrock of reducing a carbon footprint, leaders from several Synod churches shared what their congregations are doing to conserve energy and encourage the use of renewable resources.

Laura Raedke, chair of Lutheran Church of the Cross/Nisswa Creation Care Team, highlighted the process of getting congregational support and funding for a 7.56 kW ground-mounted solar array installed in May 2016. The project cost \$39,000 and was funded primarily through private donations, grants, and utility rebates; the congregation only had to support the project for \$8,000. The solar array produces energy to meet approximately 10% of the church’s energy needs. In the two years of its operation, the array has reduced carbon by 13.7 tons of carbon dioxide—an amount equal to planting 323 trees or enough solar energy to power an average Minnesota home for 22 years. The church hopes to expand the solar array within several years.

Alden Hardwick from Crosslake Lutheran described the work of an Energy Task Force formed 3 years ago to investigate a solar installation on the church’s roof and explore other energy efficiency opportunities. As a first step in energy savings, incandescent bulbs were replaced with LED bulbs followed by the replacement of fluorescent bulbs. A total of 400 bulbs were replaced with minimal cost due to their utility’s rebate program and savings to date have been substantial. Electricity costs have been reduced from \$11,000 per year to \$7,000 per year. Since LED bulbs have a 20-year life span, over \$80,000 will be saved over the lifetime of the bulbs. Following the success of the bulb replacements, other ideas noted in an energy audit were pursued. Projects included weather stripping, pipe installation, repairing air caps in the building attic, and installation of high tech thermostats to reduce wrong settings and temperatures at night that caused energy waste. As a next step, their Energy Team is pursuing support and funding for a proposed 30 kW solar array to be mounted on the church’s roof.

Kristin Foster shared a report from Elim Lutheran in Duluth on energy savings as a result of participating in the EPA’s Energy Star Program for Congregations. For more information on the Energy Star Program see: www.energystar.gov/buildings/owners_and_managers/congregations It can help congregations cut energy use by 30%. The website provides a workbook and other resources along with free, unbiased information and technical support. Elim Lutheran is one of only 8 congregations in Minnesota that are energy-star certified.

Jean Prickett from First Lutheran in Aitkin reviewed energy and water savings achieved from recent energy efficiency and carbon footprint reduction activities suggested in an energy audit. About 40% of the lighting has been replaced with LED bulbs; some hot water lines were shut off; and old toilets were replaced with more efficient models. Between 2016, when the improvements were made, and 2017 the church’s electricity usage has been reduced by 18.5% and water usage reduced by 37% resulting in over \$2,000 saved in energy and water costs. Jean also reviewed educational efforts on a variety of conservation and environmental health topics.

In closing the Summit, Rev. Kristin Foster led the participants in a Faith & Clean Energy Litany written by Tammy Walhof, Lutheran Advocacy. **A PDF of the litany is provided.**