

CARE for the Earth

By Annette Marshall, OSB

“We pledge...to reduce our carbon pollution 50% by 2030 and to become carbon neutral by 2050.” (Paris Pledge*) In 2015 our community’s long-term commitment to living sustainably on planet Earth took on a new dimension as we embraced a specific, measurable goal for reducing our carbon footprint by signing the Paris Pledge.

When three separate yet related things happen within a short time frame, it’s a call to pay attention:

In October 2014 a small group of oblates and sisters formed a committee that they named CARE—Committee for Alternative Resource Energy—to research renewable energy sources and the practicality of their use for our community buildings.

In June 2015 Pope Francis awakened the entire world to the dangers faced by Mother Earth, particularly with regard to climate change and its impact on the poor and on future generations. His encyclical, *Laudato Si*, is a clarion call to action.

In December 2015, 190 nations gathered in Paris to negotiate a planet-wide agreement to change the trajectory of global warming.

These “signs of the times” spoke clearly. We knew *what* we needed to do—but we weren’t quite so clear on *how* to do it.

Over the years we have undertaken numerous energy-related initiatives. Most recently, extensive renovations at Mount St. Benedict monastery, including increased insulation, installation of efficient hot water and heating systems, window replacement and improved lighting have increased energy efficiency.

As the renewable energy committee began researching local solar possibilities, our first steps were:

1. gathering energy usage data from all our buildings
2. procuring professional help with initial energy assessments, and
3. recording current and historical data so we could measure our progress. We found that the assessment tools of ENERGY STAR** suited our needs well.

Current projects include re-lamping our chapel with LEDs and pursuing other LED installations. Although LED lamps are more expensive than traditional lamps, the pay-back is very short (4-5 years) and they last 10 years or more. We are also reviewing our current electricity provider and hope to move to a “greener” source soon.

In addition to the work of the CARE committee, several sisters and oblates are active in a local group dedicated to preventing fracking, the unconventional horizontal drilling for gas, from impacting our area of Pennsylvania as it has other parts of the state.

Global warming is very real. Let’s all respond to Pope Francis’ call to take immediate action to “escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us” (*Laudato Si*, #163).

*As signers of the Paris Pledge, we’ve joined with thousands of other faith-based groups, businesses, universities, cities and other entities to fulfill the U.S. commitment made at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP21) gathering of 190 nations. While the agreement that they reached is far from ideal, it does commit signers to carbon emission reductions sufficient to avoid the 2-degree Celsius temperature increase that would be catastrophic for the planet.



(L-R): CARE Committee Members, Oblates Barb Roseborough, Marlene Trambley (Chair), Sharon and Neal Mosher

CARE Committee

Marlene Trambley, Oblate, chair
Sister Charles Marie Holze
Sister Cindy Hoover
Sister Dina Lauricella
Sister Pat Lupo
Sister Annette Marshall
Sam Miller
Neal Mosher, Oblate
Sharon Mosher, Oblate
Barb Roseborough, Oblate
Lynn Weissert

Maintenance Team: Gary Good and Dan Welch

Consultants: Guy McUmbert, Green Building Alliance
Steve Porter, NW PA Green Economy Task Force

** ENERGY STAR, a joint program of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Energy (DOE) has developed both residential and commercial building assessment tools that allow us to record our data and then to compare it with the data from similar buildings across the country.

Not only does this give us benchmarks for determining progress toward meeting our Paris Pledge commitment, it gives us good information for funding applications. Visit energystar.gov for this excellent—and free—resource.

Our challenge: Reduction in carbon emissions

Our approach: Seek the advice of consultants; prioritize energy efficiency measures according to expected reduction in electricity usage and the time it takes to pay back the investment. All the experts agreed – lighting is the best place to start.

Project: Replace lighting in all areas of the monastery that had not had upgrades during the recent renovation period (800+ fixtures). Old style fluorescent and incandescent ceiling lighting was replaced with LEDs which use ¼ of the energy of the older lamps and last 10 years or more.

Funding: The PA Sustainable Energy Fund awarded a grant for \$25,000. Their purpose is both to assist nonprofit organizations to employ systems that are sustainable for the planet and to educate the public about these measures. In addition, Penelec’s rebate program will be a great help in achieving funding for this project.

Your challenge: Investigate the possibility of changing your lighting at home or work to LEDs. It will significantly reduce your electricity consumption and your use of fossil fuels.

Benedictines participate in FAITH-BASED “MORALtorium” on Fracking in Pennsylvania

Faith leaders from across Pennsylvania gathered in Harrisburg on Monday, March 21, 2016 to raise the awareness that Pennsylvania’s energy policy is a moral issue. Among them were Benedictine Sisters Pat Lupo, Norma Jean Kingsley, Lucia and Claire Marie Surmik and oblate, Sheila McLaughlin. Sam Miller and Dave Weinkauf from Our Water Our Air Our Rights filled out the Erie contingency.

“The Faith community sees fracking as a deeply troubling moral issue,” explained Sister Pat. “Many faith leaders, with their congregations and supporters, are beginning to stand up and recognize this as an issue that must be addressed in their community and in the state. We must keep fossil fuels in the ground. It is time to seriously invest in alternative energy sources.”

Included in the day were: lobby training; an interfaith worship service; a rally in the Capitol Rotunda; and visits with legislators. The legislators were asked to sign a letter to Governor Wolf expressing their support of the call from the faith community for a MORALtorium on new unconventional drilling. Sister Pat offered a call to action and in her reflections she emphasized: “Pennsylvania cannot continue to ignore the fracking issue. Fracking poisons our environment, threatens our health, especially the health of our children and is destroying our natural resources. It is time to cast this dangerous practice aside and transition to clean, renewable energy that does not put our lives at risk.”

