

The questionnaire [can be accessed here](#)

## Every Square Foot Counts

### Practical Climate Action for Church Buildings

Workshop Summary · April 16, 2026

Eastern Synod, ELCIC · Environmental Building Stewardship Series

A green graphic with a white leaf icon in the top right corner. The text "Every Square Foot Counts" is in large white font, followed by "Practical Climate Action for Church Buildings" in a smaller white font. Below a horizontal line, it says "ELCIC | Environmental Building Stewardship Workshop" and "16th April 2026 – 7:30pm ET". At the bottom, there are logos for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, Eastern Synod, and Charitus, along with the tagline "Every square foot, cared for faithfully." data-bbox="111 314 884 647"/>

**Every Square Foot Counts**

Practical Climate Action for Church Buildings

ELCIC | Environmental Building Stewardship Workshop  
16<sup>th</sup> April 2026 – 7:30pm ET

Every square foot, cared for faithfully.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada  
Living Out God's Grace & Unconditional Love

Eastern Synod  
Environmental Building Stewardship Series

Charitus

## Workshop Overview

This workshop brought together ELCIC congregations from across the Eastern Synod to explore practical, theologically grounded approaches to building stewardship and climate action. Whether you joined us live or are reading this for the first time, this summary captures the key insights, tools, and commitments from our time together.

The session featured three voices alongside facilitator Katja Brittain: a spiritual reflection from Beth Lorimer of KAIROS Canada; a practical building science presentation by Stephen Collette of Faith & the Common Good; and an update on climate justice advocacy from Rafael Rodriguez of the Eastern Synod.

## Opening Reflection: Why Faithful Action Matters

Beth Lorimer, Ecological Justice Program Coordinator at KAIROS Canada and co-leader of For the Love of Creation, offered a grounding reflection on why individual and community actions matter — even when the scale of the climate crisis can feel overwhelming.

### On the Temptation to Disengage

Beth acknowledged the familiar voice of helplessness: why worry about our own footprint when corporations and the wealthy consume at far greater scale? She sat with that question honestly — but then offered a different frame:

*Caring for creation does not require big, perfect solutions. It's about steady and thoughtful care. We are not called to care for creation because it's what other people do. We are called because we are humans — part of creation, not separate from it.*

### Seeds for Transformation

Beth shared the origin story of For the Love of Creation, which began in 2018 when then-Environment Minister Catherine McKenna gathered faith communities to discuss how collective action could build the social mandate for bolder climate policy. What emerged was a recognition that small actions add up — and that change doesn't start from the top but grows from communities like the ones in this room.

She also described a tour by David Suzuki and Tara Cullis across Canadian communities, inspired by Finnish government letters asking citizens to know their neighbours and build local resilience. Her point: being present, taking action, and showing up is itself a form of witness.

*Not only are our small actions steps toward living in reciprocity with creation — they are seeds for transformation so necessary in this moment. Transformation really begins when people come together, listen, and imagine together.*

## Practical Building Science: Stephen Collette, Faith & the Common Good

Stephen Collette is a building scientist, sustainable building consultant, and heritage professional specializing in faith community buildings. He works with Faith & the Common Good and has worked with congregations of all traditions across Canada. He introduced himself simply: "I'm a whole lot of nerd — and I love faith community buildings. They tell so many stories."

### Start with What You Have: The Energy Audit

Before making any investments, congregations need to understand their buildings. Stephen outlined a spectrum of options:

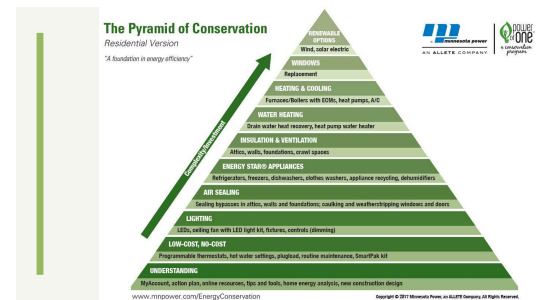
- **DIY walkthrough:** catalogue what's broken, check the age of major systems (furnace, water heater, roof)
- **Online walkthroughs:** helpful for a basic overview, though limited
- **Green Audit** (Faith & the Common Good): a comprehensive look at energy, air quality, food, water, waste, maintenance, rental, heritage, and community use
- **Energy audit:** focused on a single area but with more detailed calculations — often required for grants
- **Engineering audit:** for major capital campaigns or significant renovations

The key insight: a church building is not a house. Its physics are amplified — larger spaces, different use patterns, greater energy losses. Don't assume household logic applies.

□ [Check out this website for further church building audit toolkits.](#)

## The Pyramid of Conservation: Where to Start

Stephen presented his go-to framework for prioritizing action — the Pyramid of Energy Conservation, originally developed by Minnesota Power. The principle is simple: start at the base and work upward. Skipping the lower levels means you won't get full payback from the more expensive items higher up.



Level	What to do
<b>1. Understand your bills</b>	Track consumption, not just cost. Use Energy Star Portfolio Manager (free) to compare year-over-year.
<b>2. Low/no-cost changes</b>	Programmable thermostats, setback schedules, routine maintenance, water heater safety checks.
<b>3. Lighting</b>	Prioritize the biggest fixtures first. Parking lot lights (450W → 45W LED) have near-instant payback. Exit lights pay back in 12–16 weeks.
<b>4. Air sealing</b>	Seal your attic hatch — it sits at the top of a "chimney" (your steeple). Air sealing also helps with wildfire smoke and extreme heat resilience.
<b>5. Appliances</b>	Replace fridges over 20 years old and freezers over 25. If you bought it from Eaton's, it's costing you money every day.
<b>6. Insulation</b>	Add after air sealing. Open-vault roofs can only be insulated when the roof is being replaced — plan ahead.
<b>7. Water heating</b>	Switch gas hot water heaters to heat pump water heaters (made in Canada, significant savings).

Level	What to do
<b>8. Heating systems</b>	Transition away from gas, propane, or oil toward electric heat pumps. A major decision — contact your synod office first.
<b>9. Windows</b>	Payback is 75–230 years. Air sealing around windows matters far more than replacing them. Refurbishing old wood windows is often more cost-effective.
<b>10. Renewable energy</b>	Only install solar after reducing your electrical load. Panels on a building with old appliances and incandescent lighting are not cost-effective.

## Heritage Buildings

A heritage designation does not prevent most energy improvements. Congregations can still air seal, weatherstrip, insulate attics, upgrade appliances, and install LED lighting. The restriction primarily applies to exterior alterations. Consult your local heritage society — they can be a resource and may know trusted contractors familiar with older buildings.

## Energy Efficiency and Climate Resilience Are the Same Work

Many energy efficiency measures also improve a building's resilience to climate disasters. Sealing the attic hatch, for example, keeps wildfire smoke out, moderates extreme heat, and saves money on energy bills. You don't need separate plans — the same investments serve both goals.

## Shared-Use Spaces and Energy Accountability

If external organizations — food banks, community groups — are using your building and operating their own appliances, you may be subsidizing their energy costs without realizing it. A simple and inexpensive energy monitoring plug (available at most hardware stores) inserted between an outlet and an appliance can measure its consumption. This creates the basis for honest, collaborative conversations about shared costs and shared responsibility.

## Funding and Support: You Are Not Alone

Before making any major building decision, call your synod office. The landscape of available support is broader than most congregations realize.

<b>Utility Rebates</b>	Most provinces offer rebates for LED lighting, programmable thermostats, insulation, and appliance replacement. Your local utility is the first call — and always identify your building as an institutional (not residential) property.
------------------------	--

<b>Municipal Programs</b>	Many municipalities have energy audit grants, green building incentives, or community funding streams open to nonprofits. Worth a specific search for your area.
<b>ELCIC &amp; Synod Office</b>	Contact your synod before major decisions. Charitus can assist with property planning, financing, and lifecycle cost assessment. You don't need to arrive with a plan — just arrive.
<b>Charitus 2026 Grant</b>	Matching grants of up to \$3,000, covering up to 75% of project costs, for ELCIC congregations and institutions. Supports poverty reduction, reconciliation, and environmental sustainability. <a href="#">Deadline: May 31, 2026. Applications and further details can be found here.</a>

When to get an energy audit: if your utility bills exceed \$10,000 per year, if a major system is nearing end of life, or if a retrofit grant requires one. Those are triggers to take action.

## Climate Justice: Congregation as Witness

[Rafael Rodriguez, Director of Public Policy and Service Ministries for the Eastern Synod, introduced the Eastern Synod Climate Justice Committee and the broader landscape of climate advocacy across the ELCIC.](#)

### Eastern Synod Climate Justice Committee

Established following the 2024 Synodical Assembly (themed 'Let There Be Greening'), the Committee carries a threefold mission:

- Support the Synod in actively reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Inspire and engage in peaceful, accessible public witness — calling governments, corporations, and institutions to implement equitable climate justice policy
- Provide congregations with educational resources and tools to undertake the work of climate justice

### Recent Actions

Recent initiatives have included endorsing the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty (modelled on the successful anti-landmine treaty, now signed by multiple nation-states); promoting the Season of Creation (September 1 to October 4) as a congregational reflection period; and co-organizing the Pilgrimage for the Planet — a cycling pilgrimage from Montreal to Ottawa that gathered over 90 participants to call on the federal government for bolder climate action.

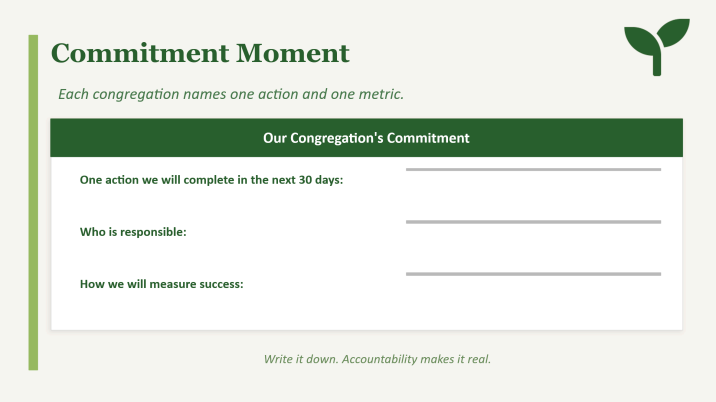
The Committee also ran a structured [Call for Climate campaign](#) over Lent, inviting Lutherans to contact their MPs and the Minister of Environment about ending fossil fuel subsidies — subsidies that have amounted to nearly \$30 billion in recent years.

*These committees are small. They rely on congregation members — people with passion, skill, and local presence — to carry this work forward in their own contexts. If this matters to you, your synod needs you.*

## Congregational Commitments

At the close of the workshop, participants were invited to name one concrete action their congregation would take in the next thirty days — one action, one responsible person, one way to measure success.

The chat reflected congregations at many different stages: some installing their fourth or fifth heat pump; others changing outdoor lighting to LED for the first time; some planning to assess rental potential in underused spaces; others simply committing to look up at their steeple and find the attic hatch.



**Commitment Moment**

*Each congregation names one action and one metric.*

**Our Congregation's Commitment**

One action we will complete in the next 30 days: \_\_\_\_\_

Who is responsible: \_\_\_\_\_

How we will measure success: \_\_\_\_\_

*Write it down. Accountability makes it real.*

*You don't have to have it all figured out. One action, one person, one measure. Write it down. Accountability makes it real.*

## What Participants Shared

Across the workshop, several practical examples emerged from congregations already doing this work:

- Multiple congregations have phased in heat pump systems — starting with one or two, adding more over time. Air conditioning became an unexpected benefit, increasing summer use of the building.
- Several have replaced outdoor and parking lot lighting with LED fixtures — often the single highest-return investment available.
- Steel roofing was mentioned by multiple congregations as a long-term investment with no regrets, even 20–25 years later.
- Tim Schaner (St. Matthew's, Kitchener) noted that the City of Kitchener has a permeable paving program for stormwater management — a municipally funded option worth exploring in your own area.

Participants also named the value of peer learning: hearing what other congregations have already done — how they funded it, how it has performed — was noted as one of the most useful parts of the conversation.

## Next Steps and Resources

### For Your Congregation

- Walk your building this week. Look up. Find your attic hatch.
- Pull two years of utility bills and compare consumption, not just cost.
- Before any major building decision, call your synod office.
- **Apply for the Charitus 2026 Partner Impact Grant by May 31, 2026.**
- Connect with your local utility and municipality to ask about incentive programs.

### Resources

- Energy Star Portfolio Manager: free online software to track and benchmark energy consumption — [portfoliomanager.energystar.gov](https://portfoliomanager.energystar.gov)
- Faith & the Common Good: [faithcommongood.org](https://faithcommongood.org) | Stephen Collette: [scollette@faithcommongood.org](mailto:scollette@faithcommongood.org) | 705-930-1011
- KAIROS Canada: [kairoscanada.org](https://kairoscanada.org)
- For the Love of Creation: [forthe loveofcreation.ca](https://forthe loveofcreation.ca)
- Charitus 2026 Partner Impact Grant: see link in follow-up email or contact your synod office
- Eastern Synod Climate Justice Committee: [elcic.ca](https://elcic.ca)
- Eastern Synod Building Stewardship: Katja Brittain — [kbrittain@elcic.ca](mailto:kbrittain@elcic.ca)

### Closing Prayer

*God of abundance, you entrust us with buildings, land, history, and hope. Bless every ministry represented here. Let every square foot bear witness to your love. Amen.*

---

**Every Square Foot Counts** is an ongoing series of national workshops for ELCIC congregations on faithful building stewardship. Next session: third Thursday of May 2026. Same Zoom link.

Questions? Contact Katja Brittain — [kbrittain@elcic.ca](mailto:kbrittain@elcic.ca)