

Church recognized for environmental efforts

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First Presbyterian Church has become an Earth Care Congregation for its commitment to care for the environment.

The church earned its certification from the Presbyterian Hunger Program at Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), according to a news release. The recognition aims to spotlight Presbyterian churches in the United States that are committed to till and keep the garden, as God's command went in the Book of Genesis.

To earn the certification, First Presbyterian Church adopted various environmental practices in its worship, education, facilities and outreach. For example, the local church replaced most of its lights with LED bulbs and old windows with energy-efficient ones, said Shelley Swoyer, chair of the social justice ministry team. The church also began recycling paper and everything its kitchen uses.

In terms of worship, the church used palms from a sustainable farm for its Palm Sunday service. Moreover, the church started a study group dedicated to reading books about the environment, which meets twice a month, Swoyer added.

"Those are the kinds of things that we've done and will continue to do," she said.

The church applied for its certification back in February. In order to become an Earth Care Congregation, a congregation needs to complete an audit detailing what environmentally friendly activities and facility improvements it has done. The national church organization then reviews each application and allocates points for actions in the four categories listed in the Earth Care Pledge.

It includes four components, which are celebrating God's grace and glory in creation during worship, supporting each other in keeping and healing the creation through education, maintaining facilities to respect and cherish all creation, as well as encouraging community involvement and public policy to protect and restore the earth through outreach, according to the program's website. A congregation needs at least 25 points in each category in order to earn the certification.

First Presbyterian Church of Jefferson City was one of more than 300 congregations to gain the title this year, according to the news release. It decided to apply for the recognition because it has focused on stewardship of the earth for a few years now, Swoyer said.

"We believe that is a big part of justice, that we have to protect the earth and also apply environmental justice for people," she said.

The certification program began in 2010, according to the news release. All Earth Care Congregations need to undergo a recertification process each year to maintain this status, according to the program's website. Two such congregations exist in Central Missouri outside of Cole County. They are the First Presbyterian Churches in Columbia and Fulton.

"Now we're in the process of thinking about what we want to do for next year," Swoyer said.