An Uncommon Adventure: Hunting Energy Vampires

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What animals did you hunt for when you were young? My brother and I liked to hunt for lizards. There was a large undeveloped lot about a mile from our house and there were many places where lizards, and snakes, would hide. We would rustle the bushes and try to be fast enough to catch a lizard or two as they scurried away. Almost every trip we could catch two or three to bring home. We would release them in our yard. I am sure my parents appreciated these gifts.

In the following paragraphs we will talk about an uncommon adventure – hunting for energy vampires. What is an energy vampire? It is electronic equipment that consumes energy when it is turned off, but still in standby mode or not in use. The result is an increasing energy bill for your home, church or office. And, when we use more energy this means more gas emissions into the environment. Therefore, reduce the energy use and reduce the gas emissions.

So where does one begin an energy vampire hunt? We might begin by better understanding why such a hunt can be helpful in reducing greenhouse gases.

As a country, the United States has been one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. As stewards of God’s creation, we have a calling to do our part to improve our environment. Within the Central States Synod and across the ELCA, many congregations are calling for a just transition away from fossil fuels. We believe this will lead to a world with better health, create new jobs from renewable energy sources and promote clean air and water so that all of creation may thrive. In this way we hope to create a safer and sustainable future for all people and for the future of humanity.

With this background we can now begin to think about where the energy vampires are. It is important to note all the places where energy is used or lost and then to spend more time on the larger vampires. For example, “vampire power” is anything that can be plugged in that can be turned on by a remote. Often there is a light (red) that glows when it is off. And there are other devices that give no external sign that they are consuming electricity – a freezer, a cell phone charger. As you begin to think about these examples, you can probably think of many places where energy vampires are at work in your environment. A typical American home will have up to 40 devices drawing power all the time. This may account for as much as 10% of energy use. To make the task a little easier, a list is attached as a start. Feel free to add additional items to this list. You can always add to the list as you progress through your hunt.

So, how do you begin? If you are doing a hunt in your home, a parent and the children may be a team to do this together by going room to room with the list and identifying the energy vampires. In some homes the family divides into teams with one team taking one floor and another the other. Each team uses the sample list as a start of devices that use vampire power and add to the list based on what you
find. Depending on the size of the home, including basement, garage and other structures with power, this could take 15 to 30 minutes. Within your family use similar processes and questions as below.

If you are doing an energy hunt for a church or office building, it is helpful to form teams of three or four people and assign an area for their hunt. It could be the sacristy, sanctuary and narthex, or the educational wings, nursery, basement or office area. Each assigned area should be assessed for energy vampires within 15-20 minutes.

Some devices may take a little investigation to determine their energy usage.

**3 Simple Ways to Calculate Energy Usage**

1. Determine the wattage of light bulbs and estimate how many hours per day, week or month.
2. For appliances, refer to its specifications to find out what is the annual energy consumption.
3. For some devices you can refer to the energy label to determine its annual energy consumption. (You may have to look up the device on the internet.)

After each team completes their list, come together and talk about your experiences. Here are some sample questions:

   - How many vampires did you find?
   - What was the largest and what was the smallest?
   - What devices did you find that were not on the list?
   - What was your most important learning or biggest surprise?

What is the impact of these energy vampires? Continuing to work in your teams, use the worksheet part of the list to determine what the cost is for each device. If you have added devices to your list and are uncertain of wattage, simply find a similar device on your list and use the same cost. When you have determined the cost for each item, add them up and determine the total. This should take not more than 15 minutes. Then prepare to answer the questions below and share with other teams.

After each team completes vampire energy loss, come together to share your findings.

   - What was the total of lost energy for your team and what were the biggest contributors?
   - Which devices would be the easiest to reduce energy loss?
   - What percentage of the total would these easy to reduce devices represent?

What are the next steps to reduce or eliminate energy vampires? Talk about three ways to optimize the operation of devices.

**Ways to Optimize Operation**

1. Reduce energy consumption by the device
2. Eliminate current consumption in the standby mode
3. Reduce the operating time of the device.

How have you addressed one or more of these in your household?
As your teams gather and share their discoveries/outcomes, total up the total energy loss. Then identify the biggest contributors. Then add up power loss for the easiest devices to reduce. For all the teams combined, what percentage of the total energy loss do these easy devices represent?

Your efforts have provided some specific areas and devices where energy can be saved. And you have determined what the potential savings might be. As a group discuss the following as potential next steps.

Who should this information be shared with?

How should this information be communicated?

As a result of developing and sharing this information, what are your hopes or expectations?

How can you follow up to learn about outcomes and net energy savings?

**Preparing for an Energy Vampire Hunt**

For the above to be most effective, the planning team for this event should consider the following:

1. Identify a team of at least three people to plan an Energy Vampire Hunt. For a congregation it would be good to include a person from the Facilities/Property Committee.
2. Review the activity outlined above and adapt to your context, participants and time schedule.
3. Determine what rooms or spaces will be included in the hunt. These should be easily accessible and safe for a team of up to four people. Walk through each room/space to be certain there are several items for the teams to discover.
4. Be familiar with what energy saving work has been completed in the last two years and how this might shape the hunt (e.g. changing light bulbs, automated thermostat or lighting).
5. Review the list of devices and determine if there are unique or specific items that should be added to the list.
6. Determine the cost of electricity per kilowatt hour for the building.
7. Be certain each team has access to a cell phone to look up information about specific devices on the internet.
8. Provide the worksheet with a list of devices to each participant.
9. Be prepared to thoughtfully listen to the learnings and outcomes of the activity and how this can be shared with appropriate people and lead to definable outcomes for the participants.

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