

Saint Barbara's roots go back to 1891 as immigrants moved to the area to work in the coal mines. The first Catholic mission church was built in the area in 1903. The congregation continued to grow, and in 1962 St. Barbara's became a parish and planned the building of a church. The building was expanded and upgraded in 2001. The parish is now home to over 2300 families. St. Barbara's is located in Westmoreland County, a rural area close to Pittsburgh PA. Key industries include farming, natural gas production, and manufacturing.

Driven by history, political communications, and the fossil fuel industry this region is not active about sustainability issues. The area is blessed with abundant trees and farmland reliable sources for clean water. Generally speaking it is not easy to have a conversation about CO2 pollution, climate change, or sustainability.

The parish has numerous ministries, including partnerships with churches in Haiti and Kentucky. We also work with the local food bank and offer a food pantry. The Ladies Guild and the Nights of Columbus actively support the needs of the parish and local community, and the church sponsors several independent youth organizations (i.e. Boy Scouts, Heritage Girls). Youth ministries are active; it is a high priority for the parish to recruit more young people as members of the parish. In total the parish is very active.

With the full support of the pastor and parish staff a Creation Care Team was started in October 2023. The initial focus was to communicate the purpose of the team and to outreach on topics related to creation and sustainability. As recycling was not practiced in the parish, the Creation Care Team took the lead on implementation. As of this writing in June 2024, the recycling program has been partially successful. Steps are underway to improve participation, especially for events that use the kitchen.

At the pastor's request the Creation Care Team worked with local contractors to assess all HVAC equipment, which has not been upgraded since 2002. The assessment determined that upgrades could cut electricity use by 50%. Additionally solar energy would be beneficial to offset the remaining use. The parish office is in favor of moving forward on our recommendation.

Engagement of the church community in sustainability discussions has been difficult. Multiple times a scheduled public presentation or event attracted NO participants. There are signs that some people are actively opposed to recycling. And in addition to the team lead we have only two full time members on the Creation Care Team.

We have learned that we need to work more closely with existing ministries to introduce creation care topics. We also must be patient and view this effort as a long term journey. More prayer and discussion is needed regarding the best role of the Creation Care Team in the parish.

Finally I have a strong belief in collaboration and team work. Our group has reached to four other Creation Care teams in our region, and we are sharing our resources and knowledge. We are finding opportunities to support each other in our mission.

Dave Wasil
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