

Churches worry about spiking energy costs: Energy Department predicts higher heating bills

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The soaring cost of keeping the sanctuary warm this winter has congregations fretting.

“People are very worried,” said consultant Andrew Rudin, who’s been advising houses of worship on energy conservation for 30 years. “We’ve never had so much business.” Rudin, of Philadelphia’s Interfaith Coalition on Energy, consults with congregations in Philadelphia and beyond on energy costs.

The Energy Department predicts higher natural gas and oil prices will make winter heating bills 30 percent to 50 percent higher than last year for most households.

The problem is complicated for churches, mosques and synagogues— often old buildings, largely empty much of the week, with high ceilings, broad expanses of stained glass, little or no insulation, and aged boilers in the basement.

Rudin, who once wrote an article titled “Blessed Are They Who Turn Things Off,” said those buildings can do surprisingly well on energy use—if people are smart about using them. “It’s not the organ; it’s the organist,” he said. “It’s the switch and the thermostat.” *-Religion News Service*