



Stories

Church story: The Switch Day

Thanks to Tash Jesson & Chris Mitchell (from St John's) and to Froi Legaspi (Hackney Citizens) for sharing this story.

Members of St John's Hoxton have developed an innovative project to help people switch to cheaper and greener energy suppliers. St John's is a Church of England parish in the Diocese of London, serving a diverse inner-city community, with areas of significant poverty and inequality.

The idea for a Switch Day came from a small group at St John's who were passionate about tackling climate change. They were also aware of the challenges facing members of their congregation who were overpaying for their gas and electricity. The church had switched its energy provider to a 100% renewable supplier, and saved money. Why not encourage individuals to switch too?

The group started by asking some questions: 'Which energy company are you with? Are you happy or unhappy with them? Why?' – and listening to people's stories. Many were on expensive tariffs (often hiked up after initially cheap rates) and wanted to switch but faced barriers like lack of time to research their options, difficult experiences in the past or fearing the process would be too complex.

St John's was already working with Hackney Citizens, part of community organising network Citizens UK. Hackney Citizens were developing a Fair Energy campaign and had identified green energy providers that offered good deals and were committed to treating their customers fairly.

A seed was sown, and with support from Hackney Citizens, volunteers from St John's ran their first Switch Day in November 2019. They set up some laptops in church between their two morning services and helped people through the process of switching online.



Tash Jesson, one of the organisers, explains the impact of the Switch Day: "Seven households switched to a renewable energy supplier, preventing roughly 10 tonnes of yearly CO2 emissions (the same amount of carbon that 4,000 trees absorb per year). Everyone cut their bills significantly. One family reduced their yearly energy bill by a whopping £600!"

Key to the success of the Switch Day idea is that it is built on trust. St John's is rooted in the local community. People knew that they would be helped through the process. The fact that the church had already switched to renewable energy opened up conversations about caring for creation, and empowered people to explore it as an option for their individual households.

The Switch Day at St John's was very much part of the Church's wider mission to be 'a beacon of hope for Hoxton'. Volunteers from St John's went on to run another Switch Day during Lent 2020 and have developed a resource pack to help others run one too. To get hold of the resource contact fairenergy@citizensuk.org



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