Churches look for ways to reduce rising energy costs

By JOHN ROBINSON Staff writer

Walking past its sanctuary, the congregation of Central Baptist Church in Spring Lake files into the fellowship hall for a Sunday night service.

The sanctuary — where services normally are held — sits dark and empty.

There’s nothing wrong with the sanctuary, except that it costs so much to heat that the church can only afford to use it on Sunday mornings.

"It’s become quite a problem with many churches," said Dr. Gwen E. McCormick, director of church building planning with the Baptist State Convention in Raleigh. "The smaller churches are especially feeling the pinch."

Most churches in the state were built before conservation was a concern and are hardly examples of energy-efficient buildings. "Most major church building programs were undertaken when energy was cheap and they didn’t pay attention to (energy efficiency)," said Dr. Claude E. McKinney, dean of the N.C. State University School of Design.

McKinney said that high ceilings and large windows do not keep the heat in the building.

In addition, the church has weather-striped windows and doors and is planning to install storm windows.

Larger churches don’t have it any easier.

"Costs escalate much more rapidly than anyone could have guessed when they made a budget," Dr. Thomas A. Collins of St. Mark’s United Methodist Church in Raleigh said.

"There is no way (P&L can do this and convince me this is a result of inflation," Collins said of rate increases by Carolina Power & Light Co. over the last few years.

For January and February, St. Mark’s spent $2,987 for electricity, nearly a quarter of its annual electric budget and $2,084 for natural gas, about 46 percent of its gas budget.

"We’re going to be over our budget," said Millard Foegeman, church treasurer.

Trinity Baptist Church in Raleigh already has spent $7,000 of its $18,500 utilities budget in two months this year.

"It’s the largest utility bill the church has had by far," said the Rev. William J. Furr about January’s bill.

To help churches conserve energy, the Baptist State Convention and the United Methodist Conference of North Carolina have staff members who work with churches in their respective denominations.

"We’re seeing considerable interest today in churches updating for better energy economy," McCormick said.

And churches are taking their own steps: including scheduling as many activities at the same time and in the same building as possible.

Trinity Baptist has hired someone to go to the church every night and turn down thermostats and make sure the lights are out. The church also has reduced its outside lighting.
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There’s nothing wrong with the sanctuary, except that it costs so much to heat that the church can only afford to use it on Sunday mornings.

The spiraling cost of energy has ministers and their congregations fired up in search of ways to stop their offerings from going up in smoke.

“It’s become quite a problem with many churches,” said Dr. Gwen E. McCormick, director of church building planning with the Baptist State Convention in Raleigh. “The smaller churches are especially feeling the pinch.”

The Rev. T.L. Cashwell Jr. of the 1,500-member Hayes Barton Baptist Church in Raleigh, summed up one of the biggest concerns of the churches, which are spending more for heat and electricity this year.

“This takes away from whatever funds we have for outreach ministry,” Cashwell said. “If funds are limited and you have these certain costs that must be paid, then something else has to give. It is these programs that give, and we’re feeling it.”

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McKinney said that high ceilings and large windows do not keep the heat in the building.

Making churches energy-efficient is expensive, he said.

“Many churches don’t have the money for capital expenditures, so they pay the price of high operating costs when they crank up the heating system for Sunday service,” McKinney said.

But the churches are taking some steps.

For instance, Central Baptist, which has a total budget of $25,000, paid a $261 electric bill in January, a 32 percent increase from January the year before, when the bill was $42.

“We’re doing everything we can possibly do to curtail the use of buildings,” said the Rev. Julian R. Gruber.

In addition, the church has weather-stripped windows and doors and is planning to install storm windows.

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Father, Two Sons Team Up For Revival

By PATRICIA TALENT
News Staff Writer

For years, Wallace Jernigan, a Baptist minister, and his sons, James “Bud” Jernigan and John “Hap” Jernigan, have dreamed of being united in the pulpit.

That dream became a reality this week with a joint revival at Central Baptist Church Family Life Center in Whitnel. The Families Revival began Sunday and the final service begins at 7 o’clock this evening.

The elder Jernigan, 67, is pastor of Five Points Baptist Church in Fernandina Beach, Fla.

Son James is pastor at Whitnel First Baptist Church and son John is pastor at Central Baptist.

All three Jernigans say religion has always been an important part of their family.

Wallace Jernigan’s father was a circuit-riding preacher in the 1920s, who traveled by horse and buggy on weekends to preach at two different places.

Both of his sons say that while growing up, they never dreamed of becoming ministers because they knew how difficult it was for their father to raise a family, work full time and preach.

Both boys were active in sports, including football, baseball and track, while their father coached Little League baseball and found the time to take them fishing.

Although they say that times were tough while the boys were growing up in Waycross, Ga., the Jernigans say their home was full of love and faith.

Aivocational preacher, their father worked full-time for the Seaboard Railroad, but his real love was preaching.

Wallace Jernigan said he would not have been able to do it without the support of his wife Nann, who put her own ambitions on hold to be a full-time mother. She returned to college at age 52 and became a registered nurse.

Jernigan jokingly says he never thought his sons would become ministers “because I never thought they would live that long.”

Both sons say that growing up they always wanted to be ministers “was the thing” they wanted to do. While Bud wanted a professional sports career and James had wanted to be a veterinarian.

Both felt the call to preach.

Jernigan says he is proud of his sons and his daughter Kay Aal who has a doctorate in business and was unable to attend the revival.

While growing up, Jernigan says his grandfather tell about going to churches with no electric lights, then there was the time, after he preached, that he got only 75 cents from the offering, including 50 cents he had put in.

Both sons recall having fun on their fishing trips with their father.

They often traveled dirt roads to fish in “secret holes in the swamp.”

Jernigan recalls cutting his arm one day while opening a can of food for lunch. Instead of ending his sons’ fishing trip, he wrapped his arm and they fished the rest of the day.

Both sons say they have a lot of respect for their father, who worked 50 to 60 hours a week on the railroad then traveled 40 to 50 miles to preach on the weekends.

“Pastors like our father are the backbone,” said James. “They are willing to go wherever they are needed to get a church started, regardless of the pay. Our dad is a great preacher, not the preacher of a great church. He is a great preacher because he took whatever payment they could give and gave them all he had.”

In those days, the payment for preaching could be in the form of chickens. But, said Jernigan, “everyone was so nice. They fed me dinner and put me up for the night.”

Throughout the years, he was pastor at 20 different churches and preached at many more, including churches of all denominations.

While in Florida, one of his churches was the fastest growing in the state, adding 140 members in two years, said son John.

“I don’t have any regrets,” said the elder Jernigan. “I enjoyed it all. I told them I was like a hunting dog. If you are spiritually hurting, I will be there. It’s been a great education. The years slow you down a little, but they make preaching more exciting because you have all those experiences to draw on.”

Jernigan says he began preaching at 16 and, “I had no idea what a sermon was. I just spoke from the heart.”

His call to preach came with “not as a bolt of lightening,” he said. “I just knew God had called me and I had no reason to ever doubt that.”

Retired from the railroad, Jernigan, at the age of 67, has his first actual pastorate.

“This may be my last pastorate, but I will continue I will continue to preach as long as I am physically able,” he said.

All three Jernigans agree that their greatest joy comes on Sunday when they are preaching, and they agree that all three have different preaching styles.

The elder Jernigan describes himself as an old-timey preacher who moves around a lot, gets soaked with sweat and has no need for a microphone.

He believes God called his two sons to preach in the same town and is responsible for the revival, which is about “pooling our talents and resources.”

His two sons will travel to Florida in February for a revival with their father at his church.

Although there are no future plans for another revival in Caldwell County, Jernigan said he hopes the practice of churches having joint revivals will again become popular.

“Forty years ago, people from all denominations came to revivals,” he said. “Today, our churches have become separated by denominations and our communities have become separated.

‘Back then, we knew everyone in our neighborhood. The revival gives the churches and our community an opportunity to again be united in the spirit of God.’

For son James, the revival is “a flashback to my childhood when we would ride 40 miles to a church with our dad to preach, and we would sing and rehearse on the way there. This is one of those precious places we will always treasure, not only as a family, but as ministers.”

He says their father has taught them hard work and faith.

They recall once when they were fishing in the swamp and it was so dark the boys’ boat would not start.

He told everything he could to start it, and his father asked them to take off their caps and he prayed for help. “The kids would not have to spend the night in the swamp with all those alleged ‘gators,’” said James.

“Where it tried it again, it cranked right up,” Father taught us to do all we could and when we can do no more to ask for God’s help.”
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(Spry Lake)

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