Implementing simple, inexpensive energy efficiency measures in their church facilities can enable African Methodist Episcopal congregations across America to redirect significant amounts of money from utility payments to fulfilling their missions in communities, an official from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies told delegates attending an AME convention in Nashville, TN on June 29.

Danielle Deane, Director of the Joint Center's Energy and Environment Program, used the occasion to report on her organization's joint energy-saving project with the AME church. She noted that more than a dozen churches have been evaluated in its initial phase, and some of them have already completed low- and no-cost retrofits and upgrades that they expect to maximize their energy efficiency and save them money that can be applied to other church priorities.

"This project offers us an unparalleled opportunity to share environmental best practices in a way that can positively affect hundreds of churches and thousands of churchgoers," she said at the 49th Quadrennial Session of the AME Church General Conference, which was expected to draw about 30,000 people to Nashville. The project also demonstrates how implementing changes to large institutions like churches can have a positive ripple effect on church members and their families, extending the awareness of smart, money-saving energy practices to homes and communities.

The staff is working in the 13th Episcopal District that includes Tennessee and Kentucky and is led by Bishop Vashti Murphy McKenzie, and the second Episcopal District that includes Maryland, Washington, DC, Virginia and North Carolina and is led by Bishop Adam Richardson Jr. The Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Congregations Program is providing technical assistance. Green DMV, a non-profit organization that promotes the use of clean energy and the development of green jobs as a way out of poverty, is working with the churches to assess their energy use and to implement low- and no-cost strategies for saving money by reducing how much energy is currently wasted.

"We want to help our congregations and communities save energy and generate dollar savings that can be used to extend their work," said Bishop McKenzie. "Some of our churches are very large and consume a great deal of energy, so there is the potential for significant savings."

"AME churches come in all sizes and states of repair, with some dating back more than 100 years, so there is great potential for savings from becoming more energy efficient," said Bishop Richardson. We are pleased that the Joint Center is able to continue its longstanding collaboration with African American churches through this initiative," said Ralph B. Everett, President and CEO of the Joint Center. The churches that have been retrofitted are Bethlehem

AME Church in Dundalk, MD, where the Rev. Marietta Ramsey is pastor; Pilgrim AME Church in Washington, DC, where the Rev. Wendell O.E. Christopher Sr., is pastor; and St. John AME Church in Frankfort, KY, where the Rev. Jermaine Wilson is pastor.