As we slide into another Minnesota winter, the EST would like to offer a few tips to help you save money, save energy, and help sustain God’s Creation.

Energy Efficiency is the best way to save money, because you reduce the amount of energy needed. Insulation is the first thing that comes to mind to make your home more energy efficient. When was the last time you added some insulation to your attic? Weatherstripping is another big one. Do you have air leaks letting heat out and cold in? You may want to add or replace the weatherstripping around exterior doors or even just add a draft snake or rolled-up towel at the threshold. If you have leaky windows, it may be time to replace them or at least consider putting window film over them during the heating season. Even ductwork can be leaky, allowing heat to escape before it gets to where it’s meant to warm you. Duct tape was invented for just this reason. You may qualify for assistance with energy efficiency projects: https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/financial-incentives

This is a good time of year to replace your furnace filter to allow the furnace to run most efficiently. A smart thermostat is an energy saver, since the temperature in the house can be set lower while people are sleeping or gone and set warmer when home. It’s also important to run a humidifier, as a level between 30-40% relative humidity will help you feel more comfortable in the winter. One thing I often forget about is reversing the ceiling fans so that they pull the heated air down from the ceiling. Also, close your curtains to reduce heat loss from windows at night, and make sure they’re open during the day to catch the free solar warming when you get the chance.

Xcel Energy offers free virtual visits from their Home Energy Squad if you want to go into more detail for your home: <https://mn.my.xcelenergy.com/s/residential/home-services/home-energy-squad>.

As far as Creation Care outside the home, this year you should make sure your trees get a good drink of water after the drought to help them get through the winter. You can mulch your leaves into your grass to provide nutrients, add fireplace ashes to your compost, and consider using sand or ashes on the ice on your walks and driveway. Chemical deicers are hazardous to pets, shrubs, and find their way into water systems.

In your gardens, leave long stems on flowering plants as the stems provide habitat for bees and other insects, leave the heads on the flowers as the seeds provide food for some birds. In the spring do not chop the stems up right away - either leave them standing, or place them off to the side, but whole and intact, to allow the insects to emerge.  
  
As for the birds, clean any feeders, as there will be less chance of spreading disease if they’re cleaned thoroughly and regularly. Clean out bird houses to prep for next spring.

Reward yourself for all your winter preparation efforts by snuggling up with a warm throw, a good book, and a cup of hot tea/coffee/cocoa! See you at church!