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Sustainability at Saint John's*

Michael Hemesath

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University, mhemesath@csbsju.edu

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Sustainability at Saint John's*

July 11, 2017



The Feast of Saint Benedict, which we are celebrating today, provides a good opportunity to reflect on Saint John's Abbey and University's deep and longstanding commitment to sustainability, particularly in light of the ongoing discussions of climate policy in the United States and abroad.

Benedictine communities, of course, have been emphasizing self-sufficiency and sustainability for over 1500 years, though the situation for 21st century communities in an industrial era is rather different than that faced by the original monasteries in a pre-industrial world.

In 2007, Saint John's President Dietrich Reinhart signed the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). Saint John's was a charter signatory, and we committed to a goal of becoming carbon neutral, meaning zero net emissions of carbon dioxide, by 2035. Two intermediate goals were set at the time to ensure continued progress: reduce emissions 15% by 2015 and 50% by 2030. We also set up a process to measure our progress toward these goals.

The ACUPCC calls for a significantly more ambitious commitment to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions than anything envisioned in the Paris Climate Accord or any other international

agreement.** We have already made significant progress toward reducing our emissions, and we continue to stand by that commitment regardless of what is happening internationally.

The most recent **Green House Gas Inventory** was completed in 2014. As of October 2014 Saint John's had reduced carbon emissions by 57.76% compared to 2008 emission levels. This reduction is the equivalent to the annual emissions of 1,363 average American households.

We were able to accomplish this level of reduction through a number of major projects. The first occurred in October 2013 with a shift from burning coal in the Powerhouse, which is the primary source of heat on campus, to burning natural gas. This reduced emissions at the Powerhouse by nearly 60%.



The second major project has been occurring over the last eight years with a significant investment by Saint John's in solar energy. In 2009 Saint John's Abbey and University partnered with Westwood

Renewables, a Minnesota based solar company, to create the four-acre Abbey Solar Field which, at the time, was the largest ground mounted solar array in Minnesota. This solar field produced 3.77% of annual electricity needs at Saint John's. With the success of this first solar array, two additional installations were constructed in 2014 and 2017, for a total solar installation of over 27 acres. At present, Saint John's receives 18.75% of its annual electrical needs from solar energy. This renewable energy source has reduced greenhouse gas emissions even further since 2014, though the exact reduction will not be calculated until our next Green House Gas Inventory, planned for later this year.

Smaller projects such as LED light upgrades, induction lights in the pool area, new temperature controls on the campus and general conservation efforts have also contributed to a reduced carbon footprint. Through these and multiple other efforts we are many years ahead of the ambitious goals set when Br. Dietrich signed the ACUPCC.

Rooted in Benedictine Tradition, Saint John's Abbey and University have always had a focus on the good stewardship of resources. Regardless of the political and policy storms that may be raging in the world beyond Collegeville, members of our community can be proud of our

commitment and efforts to reduce greenhouse gases. Our actions communicate our commitment to protect and sustain both Saint John's and our natural world for future generations.

Happy Feast of Saint Benedict!

Sincerely,

Michael Hemesath

SJU President

** The Paris Accord, for example, allowed each country to determine its own climate-action plan. [The United States' plan](#) set a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 26-28% by 2025.

Below are links for those who would like more information about sustainability at Saint John's, including waste reduction, local sourcing of food and the Sustainable Revolving Loan Fund:

- SJU Sustainability [website](#)
- Sustainability Fellow, Pearce Jensen '17: pjensen001@csbsju.edu
- SJU Magazine Sustainability article from [fall 2016 issue](#), pg. 12-17
- SJU Sustainability Office email: sjusustainoffice@csbsju.edu

* *This letter was sent to the SJU/CSB community on 11 July 2017, the Feast of Saint Benedict.*

By [Michael Hemesath](#) | July 19th, 2017 | Categories: [Economics](#), [History](#) | [0 Comments](#)

About the Author: [Michael Hemesath](#)



Michael Hemesath is the 13th president of Saint John's University. A 1981 SJU graduate, Hemesath is the first layperson appointed to a full presidential term at SJU. You can find him on Twitter [at] [PrezHemesath](#).