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# TIME BANKS, FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS, AND ECO JUSTICE

**Pastor Rick Kremer and Ruston Seaman**

## Introduction to New Vision

In the small, poverty-filled community of Chestnut Ridge, West Virginia, an innovative eco-justice movement is starting up. Powered by faith, community, and the sun, the People's Chapel Church in Chestnut Ridge, created an organization called New Vision Renewable Energy. Led by Pastor Ruston Seaman, New Vision has figured out a way of using the Time Banking concept to bring the community together to build solar panels. By helping each other, they are starting down a path towards energy independence, friendship, and an increased appreciation of the value of all individuals. At the "Time Banks, Faith Based Organizations, and Eco Justice" workshop, pastor Seaman discussed the work of New Vision, while Pastor Rick Kremer discussed the bigger picture of what it means to have a faith-based perspective towards eco-justice.

"Environmental and justice issues are not competing agendas," said Pastor Kremer. "They are intertwined elements of how humans are called to relate to God's creation." "It is not possible to care for the earth," he said "without also caring for humanity." In Chestnut Ridge, Pastor Seaman and his congregation are using New Vision to address both these issues simultaneously. For years, coal mining has been taking millions of dollars worth of resources out of the region while leaving behind contaminated water, poverty, and a culture of dependence on government handouts. While West Virginia was sacrificing its environment to produce energy, its very citizens were struggling to pay their electric bills. So, Pastor Seaman and his congregation decided to do something about it, and they started by tapping into the skills and gifts of their neighbors.

## Engaging TimeBanking

In this workshop, Pastor Seaman explained that in his community they had a very special resource: a "mad scientist" named John who figured out how to put solar panels together from scratch and make them work in a state not known for its sun. However, John's know-how for making the solar panels and Pastor Seaman's drive to help his community still needed one crucial component to come alive—the community. That is where Time Banks came in. Time Banks provided the way for creating a currency that would be used to build the solar panels. Every hour someone puts in helping other community members, earns them one "Community Hour." The solar panels for a home can be built in about nine hours with the help of 11 people. That means that in order to receive the benefits of having a solar powered home, one will need to have earned approximately 99 Community Hours by helping others. This is no government handout. "Before you get help," says Pastor Seaman, "you have to give help." In

## Participants

Dede Bruns  
D'Anne Winston  
Omayra Torres  
Amanda Smith  
Kiara Hwang  
Bishop Philip E. Nelson, III  
Kim Hodge



this process of giving, people's mentalities are changed. In a modern-day version of the old saying, Pastor Seaman likes to say "Give man money for his energy bills and you teach him how to be dependent. Give him resources, support, and training to build and install his own solar electric system and you open up a new vision of possibilities for a lifetime." New Vision estimates that the annual savings from having these solar panels will be about \$500 dollars a year at today's rates, and the panels should last 30 years. New Vision provides a loan to pay for the raw materials.

## **Mission**

Today, New Vision is helping people all the way from the Navaho Nation to Mississippi, and many secular individuals have joined this religious eco-justice community. They are also helping each other and the planet in other ways, such as developing bio-diesel production, doing home energy audits, organizing charity bike rides, and cleaning trash off the highway. New Vision is using the power of the earth and of the human spirit to build a healthier planet for everyone. In the workshop, Pastor Kremer had a passionate call to justice: "Act interdependently and in solidarity with creation." New Vision is doing just that.

For more information on New Vision, visit [www.NewVisionRenewableEnergy.org](http://www.NewVisionRenewableEnergy.org).