

Peace Lutheran Church: Pioneers in Oregon grid-tied solar!

With the installation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) system in August of 2005, Peace Lutheran Church in Philomath has become an Oregon first. The church is the first congregation in Oregon to install a grid-tied photovoltaic (PV) system. The 2.7 kW system is expected to provide up to a third of the church electricity use. OIPL project director Jenny Holmes was on hand at the dedication event to congratulate Peace Lutheran on their momentous installation serving Creation and the church's energy independence. "Sunlight is Creator's daily gift and using it to generate electricity is one of the ways we say 'thank you' for this gift." Peace Lutheran lights the way for other congregations to follow in their footsteps. To follow is an excerpt from the prayer of dedication led by The Rev. Flaschbart:

Prayer of Dedication:

C. We have dedicated this place and this property for Your use. Now we seek Your blessing as we dedicate the new roof and solar panels. By their addition, may You be glorified and Your Kingdom work enhanced.

P. May the roof and solar panels serve well the purpose for which they were designed.

C. And may Your divine protection shield us from all evil and harm, all storm and destruction.

P. May we also dedicate ourselves, for no dedication is complete without the renewal of our own hearts and minds.



The following story appeared on the front page of the Corvallis-Gazette Times.

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Lighting the way

By Carol Reeves

Gazette-Times reporter

Philomath church set to dedicate solar energy system

People of faith often refer to "power that comes from above" when describing an inner strength discovered during times of crisis. But for members of Peace Lutheran Church in Philomath, that phrase is about to have a dual meaning. On Sunday night, the congregation is gathering to dedicate a new solar energy system, one that is expected to supply up to a third of the church's electricity. The project will bring a welcome savings of money and non-renewable energy resources, and it's also drawing some extra attention to the church. Peace Lutheran is the first in the state to install a solar system to help meet its power needs.

Jenny Holmes of Oregon Interfaith Power and Light, an affiliate of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, will speak during the dedication service. Holmes said the organization is pleased with the example the church is setting for

others in the Northwest. "Oregon Interfaith Power and Light applauds Peace Lutheran Church for being the first congregation in Oregon to mount a grid-tied solar electric system. They are demonstrating stewardship of God's creation and will bless future generations by reducing global warming gasses and providing reliable energy for years to come," Holmes said. "Peace Lutheran lights the way for other congregations to follow in their footsteps."

About a year ago, an anonymous donor offered to purchase the solar energy system and have it installed as part of the church's plans to replace its badly leaking, flat roof. "We have some very generous people in our church," said Martha Kennedy, a member of the church council that brought the proposal before the congregation. Others have donated new windows, blinds and kitchen equipment over the years-- contributions the council was eager to accept if they were needed. A number of church members, including the anonymous donor, are familiar with solar energy and its potential and are very interested in the conservation of the Earth's resources, Kennedy continued. At least four families in the small congregation of about 75 to 80 Sunday worshippers drive hybrid cars.

So when the suggestion was made to install a solar energy system during the roof repair, the congregation readily agreed. About \$40,000 had been sitting in a building fund for almost 20 years and another \$52,000 was raised in the last 12 months so that the \$92,000 project could be completed debt-free. The title of the year-long fund-raiser was "Rays 'N the Roof."

The solar system is actually owned by its donor and though Kennedy wasn't sure of the details, she believed the individual worked with the Oregon Energy Trust to take advantage of state energy tax credits and other incentives available to homeowners and businesses that make renewable energy systems more affordable.

Oregon Energy Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting and funding energy efficiency and renewable energy programs through financial incentives, technical assistance and education. Created in 2002, the trust has been charged by the Oregon Public Utility Commission to administer surcharges raised by Pacific Power Co., Portland General Electric and NW Natural to support energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

The 18 Isofoton 150-watt solar panels spread across the south roof are tied to Pacific Power's electrical grid and are expected to produce about 2,680 kilowatt-hours a year. Under Oregon's net-metering law, the church's meter will spin backwards when using less electricity than the system produces.

"On sunny days, we'll be able to produce excess power, which will be credited to our account for use during the less-sunny winter," Kennedy said. Also, the extra power generated during the week when the building isn't used as heavily, can be "sold back" to the utility. "The system was designed to be effective 30 to 50 years, so over the long term, this represents huge savings," Kennedy said. It was also designed to meet the needs of a future expansion of the 3,300-square-foot church. As soon as the money becomes available, the congregation plans to enlarge the church sanctuary, add new classrooms and expand the fellowship area.

Holmes thinks one of the reasons more churches don't have solar systems is the nature of congregational decision-making. "It takes time to make decisions and to plan for a significant capital investment like solar," she said, adding one of the organizations goals this year is to develop a model for financing solar systems in churches. The Philomath congregation was fortunate in that an individual came forward offering to finance its solar system.

"We hope that others will follow Peace Lutheran by making a donation of solar to their congregation when a roof needs to be replaced. However, most congregations will need to take full advantage of the rebates and incentives available to help cover the upfront costs for purchasing a solar electric system," Holmes said.

"Oregon has some of the best incentives for solar in the nation. Those congregations that really want to make a statement should be able to go solar with some careful advance planning."

If you go

WHAT: Dedication of the new solar energy system at Peace Lutheran Church, followed by an ice cream social

WHEN: 6:30 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: 2540 Applegate St., Philomath. The celebration will be outdoors; guests are invited to bring their own lawn chair or blanket to sit on

INFORMATION: 929-5504

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