

Our Vestry is deeply appreciative for the many ways you share your time, talents and treasure in advancement of St. Thomas' mission to love, equip and serve.

We are pleased to report that construction of the Solar Farm at St Thomas will be complete in September. The system is designed with 754 panels that will provide 85% to 90% of our church's electricity usage until 2050. The new Solar Farm enables us to use our campus to financially support our campus in a responsible way that promotes good stewardship of our earth, our community, and the property entrusted to our care.

Visitors will be welcomed to explore a series of walking paths through the Meadow that lead to our Solar Farm. Some of our committees are exploring ways to utilize this new attraction as a part of our Outreach and Welcome ministries to connect with our local community.

Our Preschool is dreaming up ways to incorporate visits. Amy Roak highlights, "as a preschool STEAM teacher, it is one of my most important goals to utilize as much of our amazing campus as possible at all times of the year, and the addition of solar panels are a welcome addition to inspire STEAM curriculum about using the sun as a renewable energy source."

For several years, we have asked the question: how can we utilize our unused land to generate income to help us address our financial goals? John Kepner chaired two church committees that sought to identify how we might generate revenue from the vacant property, including the area where the solar panels are being installed. He shares, "Many in the parish have advocated for some time that we have not been very good stewards of this property by allowing it to lay fallow, but these studies identified the traffic, sewer, zoning, practical and other impediments to many commercial and residential uses on this property. The solar project reconciles these issues quite nicely."

In 2019, our Solar Task Force fulfilled its 2016 charge from our Vestry to examine a proposed ground-mounted photovoltaic electricity production system ("solar array" or "solar farm"). The Task Force proposed to construct an array on one acre of unused land located in our "Back 10" acres. As Pam McKernan, chair of the Solar Task Force, stated, "the Task Force believes the solar panels provide a 'win-win' - helping the environment AND the bottom line."

Following an extensive due diligence process, and well organized approval process—which featured terrific support from the offices of the diocese—our Vestry approved the project. During our review process, we heard support from people like Pem Hutchinson, who says of the project, "The Solar Renewable Energy Project increases cash flow, is 'green', and has little downside risk. Also, it utilizes one acre of land that produces no income." Church leaders organized to select an experienced developer and negotiate an agreement.

S O L A R at St. Thomas'



During the next five years, we will continue to make electricity payments to the developer we selected for the project. After the fifth year that the system is producing power, with your faithful financial support of St. Thomas' mission, we will complete our purchase of the solar farm equipment. Once purchased outright, St. Thomas will calculate the electricity costs saved each year and direct the savings to manage capital needs in some of our aging buildings as well as our maturing tree canopy.

A model of stewardship that we have explored at St. Thomas' entails what Rick Felton calls 'Year-Round Stewardship,' which creates five seasons in our stewardship year. These include: Stewardship of Welcoming, Stewardship of the Earth, Stewardship of Facilities, Stewardship of Community, and Stewardship of Money. This model serves as a useful framework for our collective examination of how St. Thomas' will support every one of those five areas of stewardship by harnessing solar energy.

As some of our parishioners learned about the project through conversations and the Solar Task Force presentations, some stewards sought to contribute gifts to support the project. The support was so strong that we actually raised one-third of the system cost before we signed the agreement with our developer! Our Vestry is currently working on a plan that we hope will invite broad parish participation during 2021 and 2022, giving as many parishioners as possible the opportunity to help provide long term support to sustaining our land and buildings, and most importantly, helping to fulfill our Genesis Covenant to reduce our carbon footprint 50% by 2029

We will gather during an upcoming event in October to bless the new system. When our next Earth Day Celebration rolls around on Sunday, April 25, 2021, we will have another opportunity to gather and celebrate our new Solar Farm as a responsible step towards environmental and financial stewardship. We are looking forward to being together and recognizing those generous spirits--our 2050 Energy Stewards--whose financial support, time and energy have made this project possible.

For more on the Genesis Covenant - episcopalchurch.org/files/documents/genesis_convenant_final.pdf



Jim Pasquarella
Senior Warden



“ We are called by God to care for creation and we support any move, no matter how small, to reduce our carbon footprint...

I hope it will inspire other faith communities to follow our example... This is a bold and exciting venture that seems good to the Holy Spirit and to us.

The Rev. Paul Briggs



For complete details, videos, photos and more, check out stthomaswhitemarsh.org/solar