

## **First United Methodist's Green Team says: It's Time to Bring Home our Solar Pledge Drive!**

As we turn the calendar to April, First Church's Green Team members are rolling up our sleeves and digging in to achieve two critical goals in our effort to install solar panels atop the Education Annex.

First, we must complete the drive to secure \$18,353 in pledges from First Church members as a show of our congregation's commitment to the project. We hope that total will include a "green energy" grant from the Methodist Church's Mountain Sky Conference.

Second, no later than May 1, we must write and submit our application for a \$46,322 renewable energy grant from NorthWestern Energy. Together, our congregation's pledges and the NorthWestern grant would fully fund a 66-panel solar array atop our building.

Here is the plan, as provided to First UMC by Ralph Walters, general manager of Missoula's SBS Solar. (You can see his full proposal at [this link](#) on First UMC's website.)

After taking measurements, Walters determined that the Annex roof will accommodate 66 solar panels. That's enough to provide 80 percent of First Church's annual electrical needs!

Although the usable space is smaller than he originally estimated, Walters said new developments in solar technology will make up for some of the lost production. The solar modules he'll use on our building will create energy from both sides of the panels, providing 10-15 percent more power. In all, they'll generate 34,000 kWh per year from the sun.

Walters' design also includes a ballasted roof mount structure, which eliminates roof penetration for the solar module mounting and can withstand 100 mph winds. That's critical, given our church's location in the path of Missoula's fierce Hellgate Canyon winds.

Total system cost will be \$66,175. SBS will donate \$1,500 of its time, bringing down the price to \$64,675.

With Walters' assistance, First Church's Green Team will apply for the NorthWestern Energy grant of \$46,322 – or 70 percent of the solar system's cost. Our congregation and other grants will provide the remaining \$18,353.

In March, we made a \$2,000 deposit on the installation so an engineer could begin final design work and SBS Solar could place our project on its schedule for this summer. In the unlikely event that the project falls through, Walters will refund the deposit.

Of course, the NorthWestern Energy grant is critical to the solar array's funding, so we have a team at work on the application. Walters is preparing the technical system information. Kathie Snodgrass is assembling a computer display that will provide real-time data on our solar production to congregation members and visitors. Carole Addis is preparing solar education curricula – one for Sunday School classes, one for adults in our congregation and the larger community. Karen Loos is using her artistic skills to produce mockups of several posters that will tell the story of our church, the new solar array and how the sun generates electricity. Sherry Devlin is writing the application and cover letter, as well as a public relations plan for the array's formal unveiling. Together, these components answer NorthWestern's questionnaire.

Taking the lead on our pledge campaign is Green Team co-chair Jim Gillison, who has kept the effort on schedule and before the congregation since it began in January. A pledge of \$250 buys one solar panel, but any amount is a significant help. **To make your pledge, contact Jim Gillison at (406) 546-1359 or by email at [james.gillison@msn.com](mailto:james.gillison@msn.com), or talk to any other member of the Green Team, Pastor John or Genevieve in the church office. Let's bring this project home – to the roof, generating clean electricity for Missoula First UMC!**