

# EarthCare Connections



Fostering awareness of our spiritual oneness with the earth and promoting active care of creation.

[www.unityworldwideministries.org/earthcare](http://www.unityworldwideministries.org/earthcare)

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## Is Now the Time to Go Solar?



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This is a question that many Unity spiritual centers are asking themselves these days. The benefits are obvious: being a good steward of the environment, setting a good example for your congregation and lower energy costs. It can even turn into a source of profit, as the average investment in solar results in an average overall return of 10% in the U.S. ([www.solarpowerrocks.com/state-solar-power-rankings/#irr](http://www.solarpowerrocks.com/state-solar-power-rankings/#irr)). But what are the costs, where do we go for financial assistance, and where do we even begin?!

These are tough questions, especially in this time of uncertainty for many religious organizations that lead many people to throw up their hands in despair. At least there is some comfort in knowing that you're not alone in your frustration.

The good news is that there a number of resources out there that can make your dream become a reality. There even is a renewable energy company called “Interfaith Power and Light,” (IPL) whose sole mission is to inspire and mobilize people of faith to take action that promotes energy conservation, energy efficiency and renewable energy (<https://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>). IPL even provides a link to programs, activities and resources that are available in your state.

One of the biggest hurdles that churches face when considering solar is that, as a non-profit organization, they are ineligible for tax benefits that are available to commercial entities. So they often turn to their congregations for contributions. While this can play a role, it is simply is not enough for many congregations. That’s why you may also consider signing a Power-Purchase Agreement with an established solar company or forming an LLC that can take advantage of tax breaks. Each is briefly discussed below. For a more complete discussion, go to “[Churches around the country are going solar.](#)”

### Option 1: Taking Contributions

If your congregation is into tithing, and you can [get a good deal from a local solar company](#) (around \$3 per watt installed is good), this can be a great way to keep things simple. After the purchase, your church will own a rooftop solar system, and accrue all the future financial benefits thereof. While there will be a big initial investment, you will enjoy significant savings for years to come with a payback around year 15. After that, the panels are under warranty to keep making electricity until year 25 (where our estimates end) but could continue to operate for years after. The problem is finding the cash to buy the system up front, which is why a Power-Purchase Agreement can sometimes make more sense. To wit:

### Option 2: Signing a Power-Purchase Agreement (PPA) with a solar company

A PPA usually doesn’t require any money down. Under the agreement, a solar company installs panels on the church roof and sells the electricity to the church. The starting per-kilowatt-hour (kWh) rate is usually a little below the price you pay the utility company, but it’s also usually designed to go up by a certain percentage each year (1-3% is common). A typical PPA contract runs for 10 years.

The upside is you know exactly how much you’ll be paying for electricity for the next 20 years, and the solar output is guaranteed by the PPA Company.

They do all the work and put all the materials on the roof, and you pay the money.

The downside is this kind of arrangement only works if your state allows third-party solar financing ([four states don't](#)) and whether your state has good net metering rules. The church will save money as the years go by because most PPA's limit increases solar electricity costs to 2% annually, versus an average increase of electricity of about 3.5% across the country. If these numbers hold true, the church will save a lot of money over the 20-year PPA contract, but the savings aren't guaranteed. That's why some parishioners set up an LLC to purchase a solar installation and sell the electricity.

### Option 3: Having congregants establish an LLC

Setting up an LLC to purchase a solar installation and sell the electricity is a brilliant idea. That's because the LLC qualifies for the Federal government's direct grant of 30% of the costs of installing a solar array (under [section 1603](#) of "the stimulus" of 2009).

As an example, a \$30,000 10-kW installation cost would result in a direct cash payment of \$9,000 to the LLC, reducing the year-1 cost to just \$21,000. At that point, the LLC could sell the solar energy to the church at a flat rate of 8.5 cents/kWh for the next 20 years, which would allow the investors to break even while helping the church benefit to the tune of \$22,000 in energy cost savings.

This can result in amazing savings for the church. In addition, depending on your state there can be other ways to profit from solar—[like SREC sales](#)—that can change the payback numbers for the better.

### What can go wrong with solar for a church?

The list here is about the same as for a homeowner—the roof could need reconstruction before the system can be installed, the price of electricity could rise by less than 3.5% per year, or the state laws about [net metering](#) could change sometime in the future, making the installation less profitable.

### Inspiring stories

The stories of nine churches that have successfully gone solar can be found at [www.solarpowerrocks.com/solar-politics/churches-are-going-solar/](http://www.solarpowerrocks.com/solar-politics/churches-are-going-solar/).

If you would like to share your story about going solar at your church, please write the editor.

\*Much of this article was taken from, “Churches around the Country are Going Solar, [www.solarpowerrocks.com/solar-politics/churches-are-going-solar/](http://www.solarpowerrocks.com/solar-politics/churches-are-going-solar/)

## Unity of New Braunfels, Texas, Completes the Path to EarthCare

Unity of New Braunfels, Texas, is the 17<sup>th</sup> congregation to complete the seven step Path to EarthCare, thereby achieving certification as an “EarthCare Congregation,” ( Level C of the program). Since 2016, their 24 member Green Team has been a leader in making care for Earth an important component of its spiritual message, and enacting many programs and activities to put their belief into action. A few of these include installing recycle bins in all public rooms and the offices, replacing and installing all light bulbs with LED, and regularly use mulch in landscaping planted areas to combat weeds (do not use Roundup). In addition, the 20 year old sanctuary is made completely by hand with stained wood walls, handmade wooden pews with handmade cushions. The building was constructed with care and consciousness. We used double paned glass and heavy insulation in the roof and outer walls. You can feel the love upon entering the building.” Congratulations Unity of New Braunfels!

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## EarthCare Team Spreads the Message

In response to former Chairperson Rev. Sharon Ketchum’s call for 90% of Unity congregations to become certified at least at Level A of the EarthCare program by June of 2020, members of the EarthCare Core Team have fanned out across the nation to attend the following regional conferences:

Mike McCord.

The Canadian Regional Conference was held at Unity Village, September 24-28, 2019. Eight congregations signed to receive the quarterly newsletter.

The South Central Region held its annual conference at Unity Village, October 8-10, 2019. Mike spoke at the convention and afterwards four congregations signed up to participate in the program and many more expressed interest.

#### Ron Habin

Southeast Regional Conference, July 2019. The minister of Unity of Gainesville, FL, a master gardener, said they have a ten-acre campus and she is working on “saving their creek.” She is enthusiastic about joining EarthCare. The minister at Unity of Sun City (South Tampa) said she wants to attract younger congregants and believes that instituting an EarthCare perspective will help to advance her vision. Several ministers expressed interest in how EarthCare could assist in helping to bring a new successful faith center to life. Ron wishes to thank Rev. Bob Fortner for hosting this well-attended conclave. He did a magnificent organizational job and was very generous in his permission for this EarthCare representative.

#### Cylvia Hayes

Northwest Regional Conference. Three congregations signed up for EarthCare work. After listening to Cylvia’s presentation, CEO Jim Blake expressed the need to have the EC work such as recycling expanded into more of the Unity buildings, and also in having a sustainability program instituted at the Village which can also serve as an educational outreach.

#### Kathy Harwood Long

In April, the Great Lakes Unity Region celebrated the first ever Mindful Eating Level A certification. Conference participants stood in applause as Rev. Alden Studebaker and board members of Unity Christ Center of Eau Claire, WI, received the certificate. Rev. Grace Nicodemus began Mindful Eating as a facet of EarthCare. Level A is the consciousness step leading to more conscious choices and actions related to eating. Congratulations, Unity Christ Center of Eau Claire!



Pictured: Representatives of Unity Christ Center of Eau Claire, Wisconsin

## Mentoring Calls

David Cordova hosts EarthCare’s monthly mentoring calls. As David says, “It is a thrill to connect with Unity friends from across the country to assist congregations in establishing an environmental committee and share inspiring stories regarding team activities.” Some examples include Unity of San Antonio’s “Adopt a Street for Clean-up” program and Unity of Cape Cod’s installation of a solar roof. New films and books are also recommended. The green team support calls are usually held the third Saturday morning of the month at 11 a.m. Central.

We also offer a sub-team called “Mindful Eating,” which discusses issues such as farm-to-table sustainability, animal welfare and species preservation. These calls are held the third Wednesday of the month at 4 p.m. Central, led by Helen Wright.

The green team support call and the Mindful Eating call use the same video conference and dial in numbers.

Dial in number for **AUDIO ONLY:**  
 (571) 392-7650  
 Pin: 779 087 6107

We also offer an optional video conference system. For Audio using a computer microphone and Video, Cut and paste this link into **Google Chrome** URL (top line):

<https://us.bbcollab.com/guest/d72429ecf4714e00988087381f84d51f>

Our next series of calls will be focused on supporting teams achieve Level A of EarthCare certification which primarily involves creating a covenant.

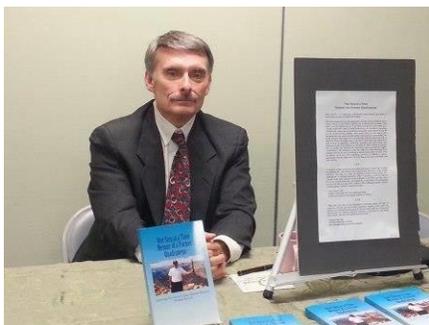
## UN Youth Climate Summit, “The Power of One”

In September of 2019, the first-ever UN climate summit for young people was held in New York City. It provided a platform for young leaders to showcase their solutions and meaningfully engage with decision-makers. More than 700 mostly young activists demanded bold climate change action to help poor nations adapt to a warming world and provide greener energy. Demonstrations were also held across six continents, where millions of people showed their support for the cause.

Sixteen-year-old Swedish activist Greta Thurnberg, who started the climate strike movement with her lone protest in front of her country’s parliament about a year and a half ago, gave the keynote address and stated, *We showed that we are united and that we, young people, are unstoppable.*

I know from personal experience that our work to promote the environment can be a long and sometimes discouraging process. However, stories about the brave and committed work of these young people inspire me to continue and I hope they will do the same for you. It demonstrates the tremendous power that one person’s action can have upon the world, which is increased exponentially knowing that we are in the divine flow of the universe and that our cause is a just one for ourselves and future generations.

[www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-09-21/youth-leaders-demand-bold-climate-change-action](http://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-09-21/youth-leaders-demand-bold-climate-change-action).



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