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First Unitarian Society's Iconic Meeting House Now Powered by Solar Energy

Madison, WI - On Sunday, October 13th, the First Unitarian Society of Madison held a dedication ceremony for their newly-constructed solar array. First Unitarian Society of Madison is a community where “curious seekers gather to explore spiritual, ethical, and social issues in an accepting and nurturing environment.”

The 79-kilowatt project is comprised of over 200 solar panels and will produce enough electricity to power approximately 16 average-sized homes. The solar array will offset around 50% of First Unitarian's electricity consumption, including powering a majority of their original Frank Lloyd Wright Meeting House.

“This was a challenging installation with multiple roof areas, angles, roofing materials, and types of building construction at the Meeting House”, said Burke O’Neal of Full Spectrum Solar. “But this system will cover over half their electricity thanks to the Society’s dedication to installing as large a system as possible.”

The solar array at First Unitarian Society was a project over 10 years in the making. Members and staff explored solar electricity in 2008, but the economics at that time prevented the project from happening.

“Costs to install solar have decreased over 75% in the last decade,” said Sam Dunaiski, Program Manager at RENEW Wisconsin. “The trend we’re seeing is that more homeowners, businesses, and nonprofits are choosing to ‘go solar’ as much for the economic benefits as they are for the environmental benefits.”

RENEW Wisconsin's *Solar for Good* program provided First Unitarian Society with a \$20,000 grant to assist with the upfront costs of the solar array. The project also received funding

assistance through solar bonds from Legacy Solar Co-op, which helped First Unitarian install a larger system.

“Legacy Solar Co-op provided technical assistance as well as an \$84,000 loan funded by co-op members supporting community solar projects in Wisconsin,” said Kurt Reinhold of Legacy Solar Co-op. “Over half of this loan was funded by First Unitarian congregants who joined the co-op to make this project happen.”

Several years ago, the First Unitarian Society Ministry Team set a zero-carbon goal for the congregation. While the solar array does not entirely fulfill that goal, it does help the congregation take a major step forward.

“Together with current and upcoming energy-efficiency upgrades, our solar panels will cut our power consumption in half,” said Eric Sundquist of First Unitarian Society.

First Unitarian Society also plans to offset their carbon footprint through Madison Gas and Electric’s Shared Solar and Green Power Tomorrow programs, as well as Legacy Solar Co-op’s Switch to Solar program. The organization has also made upgrades to their HVAC systems, lighting, and insulation to further reduce their energy consumption.

“This project will cut carbon pollution associated with our building, and save money for the congregation in the long run,” continued Sundquist. “We also hope it will spur our members and others in the community to consider ways they can shift to renewable energy.”

About Solar for Good

RENEW Wisconsin’s Solar for Good initiative fosters the expansion of solar power among mission-based nonprofits and houses of worship in Wisconsin. Through a generous partnership with Couillard Solar Foundation, RENEW Wisconsin awards solar panels to nonprofit organizations, helping them switch to clean, renewable, solar energy.

About RENEW Wisconsin

RENEW Wisconsin is a nonprofit organization which promotes renewable energy in Wisconsin. We work on policies and programs that support solar power, wind power, biogas, local hydropower, geothermal energy, and electric vehicles. More information on RENEW’s website: www.renewwisconsin.org.