

Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church Kensington, MD

Clean Energy for the Community

Summary statement:

Warner Memorial Presbyterian Church won the Renewable Role Model Award from Interfaith Power & Light in their Cool Congregations Challenge for developing a Community Solar project with newly installed solar on the roof of their facility whose output exceeded their needs, so they've been able to provide electricity at reduced rates to a neighboring non-profit housing program and a number of local families.

“Peace and justice is God’s plan for all creation. The earth and all creation are God’s. God calls us to be careful, humble stewards of this earth, and to protect and restore it for its own sake and for the future use and enjoyment of the human family.” — **Presbyterian Earth Care Congregations Pledge**



Warner Memorial's story -

Several years ago, we had a dream and a challenge. Our dream was to replace the electricity we were getting from PEPCO (our electricity supplier) with cleanly generated electricity, and by our example, encourage others to do the same. Being a PC(USA) Earth Care Congregation, we are committed to environmental stewardship, but nothing seemed financially feasible.

In 2017, Warner helped form the National Capital Presbytery Youth Carbon Analyst Program, which brought together high school youth to be leaders in energy transformation in congregations. In 2020 they made presentations on rooftop solar generation. Profiles of several local churches were presented, including an analysis of Warner Memorial. The analysis showed

that our roof could generate twice the energy we need! Then we consulted with Lumina Solar (who eventually installed the system) and replaced our aging roof.

Thanks to a webinar sponsored by the Interfaith Power & Light DMV affiliate covering DC, Maryland, and Northern Virginia, we learned about upcoming legislation that would make the existing Community Solar pilot a permanent program. In Maryland's program, the owner/lessor can use up to half of the electricity generated, and the other half is made available to subscribers in the community. We also learned about funding possibilities through the Montgomery County Green Bank.

We contacted Cindy McCabe at the Montgomery County Green Bank. She approached a solar energy developer, Skyview Ventures, who was eager to begin working with nonprofit organizations and was willing to take on a small project like ours. She helped us develop a Community Solar program, with financing from the Montgomery County Green Bank for Skyview Ventures. Our church's Earth Stewardship Team shepherded a contract with Skyview Ventures through all the required approvals and negotiated a rate reduction averaging 27%.

We could have taken most of this rate reduction for our own use. However, we instead chose to use the average reduction (27%) only for Warner Memorial's half of the generated electricity and to offer a smaller rate reduction (10%) to three member-households for access to one-quarter of the electricity. This enabled us to pass along a large rate reduction (44%) on the remaining electricity produced to Housing Unlimited, a non-profit that seeks to provide affordable housing to very low-income adults in mental health recovery in Montgomery County. Our Community Solar project connected to the grid on November 17, 2023. Warner expects to use only 41,150 kWh of the total 82,300 kWh we expect to produce annually, and to provide 20,000kWh to Housing Unlimited at a 44% discount.

This experience brought together diverse stakeholders, including a church, a social-service non-profit organization, a county-backed financial institution, and a private developer - all working towards a common goal of caring for the environment and one another. The collaboration yields two benefits: it replaces carbon-intensive electricity with carbon-free solar, and it provides electricity at a reduced cost for our church building and for financially pressed members of our community. We hope to be an example to other organizations and an inspiration to leaders adopting clean energy strategies.

Church website: <https://warnermemorial.org/>

Contact June at june.eakin@mac.com for more information.