

# Orthodox Parish Chooses Solar Power

by Catherine Frye



IF WE ARE TO BE RESPONSIBLE caretakers of God's creation, as the Scriptures command, we have to reach into our Orthodox tradition and discern how our faith addresses modern issues. Like "new wine out of old wineskins," solar power allows us to fuel our energy needs without harming our neighbors.

"Almost every small Orthodox parish struggles to balance expenses and income," says Fr. Lawrence Margitich, pastor at Saint Seraphim of Sarov OCA parish in Santa Rosa, California. "A large part of expenses are the utilities. We felt that utility costs were too much, but felt helpless, not just because we had this large expense, but because that money was being spent on oil and gas that contributed to pollution."

"Thanks to the providence of God," continued Fr. Lawrence, "a solution came to us to solve these worries. Mr. Christopher Frye, a parish member, installs solar panels. Chris came to me with the idea that the parish could use solar energy to supply its electrical needs. With a

solar electrical system, our parish would use renewable "green" energy, rather than energy from fossil fuel pollutants.

"It quickly became clear to me and to members of the Parish Council that with clean solar power, our parish would not only practice Orthodoxy in our faith and relationships with God and man, but also in our relationships to the world. We would have an environmental Orthopraxy!

"It is fitting that the Orthodox Church take the lead in our community by setting an example for society. Solar energy turned out to be a wonderful way to accomplish this. By replacing hydrocarbons with photovoltaics, we are reducing greenhouse emissions and other toxics that pollute the air and water."

Parishioners were enthused with this idea. Cal "Seraphim" Strobel, a petroleum exploration engineer, observed that with the parish using solar power, we will operate in ways that honor God by respecting what He has created.

Laurel Counts, parish bookkeeper, says, "From the beginning I thought it was a great idea. Financially, ecologically, economically, even spiritually, this was the right choice."

"What struck me afterwards about our installation of solar power is that it gave me a surprising sense of greater integrity. That makes me feel very good about our parish."

Fr. Lawrence, reflecting further, added, "Isn't it true that any Orthodox parish ought to tend its landscape and grounds in order to make it beautiful, to

shape it into a garden, as a humble icon — albeit a hazy one — of God's Paradise?"

"For some people four rows of solar panels are not the most beautiful sight. For others, those panels represent a commitment to avoiding fossil fuels. In that sense, it is a pleasure to see these beautiful technological components in our field. Besides, the cost savings are substantial. Over thirty years we expect to save \$500,000 in utility expenses. That figure is calculated using current costs, and natural gas prices will likely rise in the years to come."

Seraphim Strobel added, "As a petroleum engineer, I know that oil resources will be exhausted within the lifetime of our grandchildren. One of the most loving things that we can do for generations still to come is to develop alternative energy resources now."



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### Need Help Going Solar?

If your parish wishes help in turning to solar power, please contact the Orthodox Fellowship of the Transfiguration. We offer parishes and parish members free estimates plus discounted installations of solar power across the U.S. Inquire for

