

PROJECTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

Church were four of the six pioneers in the solar program.

Besides installing solar panels, each of the congregations also has worked with its members to lower energy use at home and elsewhere.

PANELS

First United Church has largest array of solar panels on Indiana church

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

Skiles said. The fact that the church has a raised seam metal roof meant it would be easier to install solar panels on the roof, which has very few trees or other obstructions to keep sunshine from reaching it.

The church had two fundraising dinners earlier this year, and along with other donations and a \$2,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County's renewable energy fund, the church raised a total of \$163,955.

"Some people outside of the congregation donated, too," said Mark Stosberg, who established the church's solar panel committee. Stosberg said raising the funds was "fairly easy," something Darrell Boggess, an adviser with SIREN, said is true in the Bloomington area and beyond. Boggess said 80 percent of the public is supportive of solar energy.

That local support was fully realized on Sept. 18, when a ribbon-cutting ceremony was conducted. First United Church now has the largest solar array on a church in Indiana. There are currently 29 religious congregations in Indiana that have panels to produce solar energy. Churches and buildings for other religious groups make great places for installing solar panels, Boggess said, because they tend to be permanent structures that are part of a community for generations.

Stosberg said some members of First United Church were happy to help fund the solar

First United Church is the latest, and it has solar panels collecting the most solar energy.

"Churches typically make decisions based on their beliefs of what is important, like fairness, justice and compassion," said Darrell Boggess, of Solar Indiana Renewable Energy Network (SIREN). "Millions of people around the world are suf-

fering because of climate change, mostly due to the presence or absence of water (droughts, rain, floods, typhoons, melting glaciers).

"Many faith traditions recognize that climate change may be the dominant reality of this century."

Anyone interested in learning more about congregations pro-

curing solar panels can contact Hirschland at mhirschland@gmail.com.

Another organization, Hoosier Interfaith Power and Light, also is involved in helping secure grant funding for solar panels for congregations.

For more information, contact the Rev. Trisha Tull at TrishaTull@hoosieripl.org.



CAROL KUGLER | HERALD-TIMES

These solar panels on the roof of First United Church are the largest solar array on a church in Indiana. There are currently 29 churches and religious congregations across the state that have solar panels that provide part of the congregation's electricity.

"It's been a community builder within the church."

Laura Kao, chairwoman of First United Church's building and grounds committee, and a member of the solar panel committee, talking about the installation of solar panels at the church

didn't want to, or couldn't, put solar panels on their homes. "They were happy to support the church's effort," he said, noting that the project is not only economical but in tune with the church's moral code of helping with sustainable practices.

First United Church now has 307,270-watt solar panels placed mainly along the roof over the

The panels are rated at 82.9 kilowatts and expected to produce about 100,000 kilowatt hours annually, which is projected to save the church about \$9,000 a year in electric bills.

"A typical home would use 10 percent of that in a year in electricity costs," Boggess said, adding that the energy produced by the solar panels is more than half of what the church consumes in a year.

And that's saying a lot, since the church is used not only on Sundays and other days for church activities and groups but also is used by South Central Community Action Program's Head Start, the Interfaith Shelter and an Area 10 Agency on Aging food pantry, as well as a host of other groups, from Bloomington

International Harp Competition. An average of the electric bills for the church from 2013 to 2015 was \$1,523.58 a month.

Besides installing the solar panels, First United Church also surveyed some of its congregation. A total of 38 people filled out the survey, Kao said. They shared what they do to conserve energy, from keeping their refrigerator door closed to riding bicycles. "It's been a community builder within the church," Kao said.

The church also is now giving some of the electricity it produces to its neighbors. When it has an excess, the power goes out on the grid.

"It's entirely possible that First United is supplying energy to St. Charles," a neighboring church,