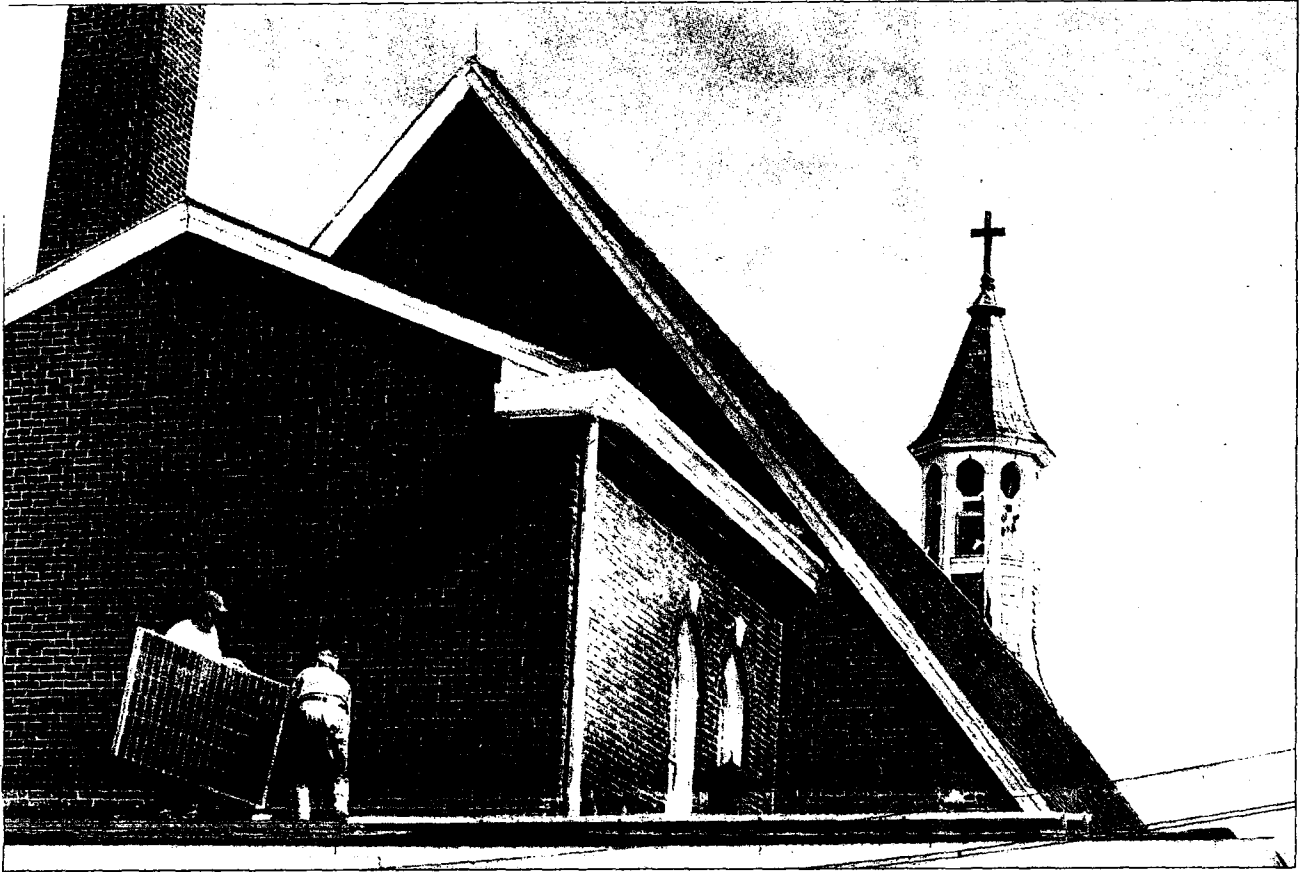


EARTH DAY CELEBRATION

Church adds solar power



Photos by Bill Luster, The Courier-Journal

Thomas Wayne, left, and Jeremy Coxon placed a solar panel atop St. William Church. Coxon is president and co-owner of Sun Wind Power Systems of Floyds Knobs, Ind. The panels should provide about 30 percent of the church's electricity.

By James Bruggers

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Bob Eiden spent his Earth Day on the roof at St. William Church with volunteers who installed 15 solar panels.

After slathering on some sun screen, he said the work was a natural follow-up to taking part in a March 2 demonstration against coal combustion outside the Capitol Power Plant in Washington, D.C.

"I really like the idea of solar energy," Eiden said. And, he said, "I just love this parish."

Organizers said they hadn't been able to find any other churches in Kentucky that have installed photovoltaic panels, which convert the energy from the sun to electricity.

"This is a tangible way of showing care for God's creation," said Tim Darst, a member of St. William and the executive director of Kentucky Interfaith Power & Light, a nonprofit organization whose mission is mobilizing a religious response to global warming.



Jane Ann Comerford watched the panels being installed at the church on West Oak Street. The 15 panels cost about \$18,000

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The shiny blue, high-tech panels are a stark contrast to the black slate that covers the steeply pitched main roof of the West Oak Street church, built more than a century ago. The panels were placed on a southern exposure and gentler-sloping section of the roof.

The panels cost about \$18,000, are expected to generate about 30 percent of the church's electrical needs and could pay for themselves in 12 years, said Sharan Benton, the pastoral administrator. But she said money wasn't the point.

"We are doing something to try to preserve the Earth," she said before climbing onto the roof to pray and bless the panels with holy water.

Church officials said the panels will replace power that would require the emission of about 8,000 pounds of carbon dioxide a year. With the help of Kentucky Interfaith Power & Light, the purchase was made possible through donations from individual parishioners that were matched by the church.

Parishioner Donnie Feeney, who like Darst has solar panels on his home, also helped. "I know how much fun (and) how exciting it is to get energy from that big star up there that's free and sustainable."

As at Feeney's house, the panels at St. William will be connected to the electrical grid using a "net-metering" arrangement with LG&E. That allows the utility to "buy back" excess energy and eliminates the need to store the energy on-site in batteries.

Feeney said his electrical bill has dropped to zero, adding that Kentucky has plenty of sunshine.

He noted cheap coal-generated electricity has made it more difficult for solar power to catch on in Kentucky.

"But the problem is, coal doesn't pay its way," he said, referring to health and environmental costs that aren't reflected in electric bills.

Darst said he expects coal, a major source of greenhouse gases, will only get more expensive to burn if Congress and President

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Barack Obama move forward with plans to curb global warming. That will make the panels a better investment, Darst said.

The church bought the panels from Sun Wind Power Systems of Floyds Knobs, Ind., which donated its time to oversee the installation.

Pat Coxon, the co-owner and president, said solar water-heating systems are more popular in the region because their savings cover initial costs more quickly.

But she said federal tax incentives are encouraging more solar panel installations.

Tina Ratterman, a Spencer County resident who is interested in solar design, volunteered at the suggestion of a cousin and member of St. William. "If everybody put a couple of panels on their houses, it would make a difference," she said.

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