

A Solar Story

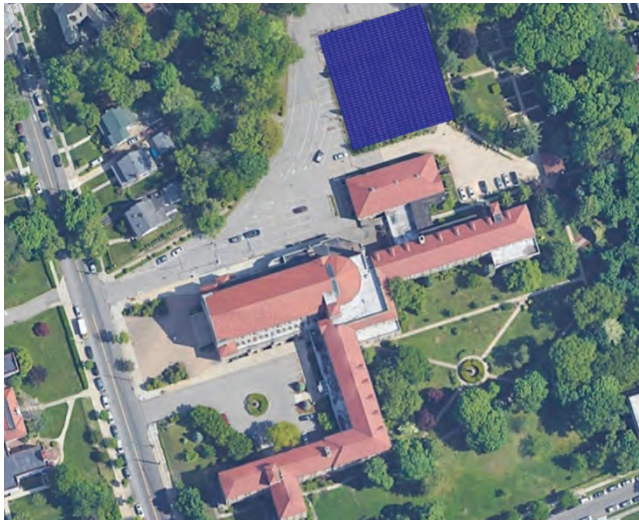
The Passionists | [St. Paul of the Cross Province](#) | Feb. 2021

Have you heard the saying by management consultant Terrence Gargiulo that “the shortest distance between two people is a story”? Well, it was a simple newspaper story about the largest solar power system ever built on Catholic-owned property in Washington DC that motivated Father Jim O’Shea, C.P., Provincial for the Passionists, St. Paul of the Cross Province to introduce himself to the Catholic Energies program.

Since the first phone call from Fr. Jim to Page Gravely in August of 2019, the Passionists have undertaken a mission to utilize their portfolio of properties to act on their care for creation. “The legacy of Eco-theologian, Passionist and Catholic priest Thomas Berry challenges us to engage the ecological crisis and do our part in mitigating the destruction of climate change”, says Fr. Jim. “We need more than words about our care for the earth. Solar panels atop our properties silently ‘preach’ to children, parents and the neighborhood that this is an urgent demand and one that we can respond to.”

The Passionists, St. Paul of the Cross Province own and operate a diverse real estate portfolio in different U.S. states and Puerto Rico, including a monastery, retreats and schools. The team at Mission Energy, who operate the Catholic Energies program as a service of the Catholic Climate Covenant, collaborated with Fr. Jim over a few weeks at no cost (and with no obligation) in order to dissect all of the variables at each location to help Fr. Jim and leadership make fully informed decisions each step of the way. For example, solar designs need to

accommodate each property’s respective structures. The opportunity for using solar to reduce energy costs also depends largely on the current utility bill costs, state incentives, and utility policies serving each property.



(Design illustration of future carport solar at Immaculate Monastery in Jamaica, NY)

Once the design considerations and other variables were dissected, the collaborators turned to the most critical question: “how would these projects be paid for?” Fortunately, each property had options based on state and utility policies. Mission Energy developed various models for each option at each property.

The Passionists settled on the best option that was available for the first three locations they chose to build – a Solar Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) whereby the Passionists would not have to provide any money to build and own the systems. Mission Energy found and secured the Solar PPA funding from Inclusive Prosperity Capital (IPC), a not-for-profit

investment fund enabling communities to utilize renewable energy. IPC will own and operate the systems while the Passionists properties pay for the solar produced on site. That less expensive solar power will displace their more expensive utility power, saving the properties thousands of dollars a year in operating costs.

The result is that their Immaculate Conception Monastery property and the site of the future “Thomas Berry Place” retreat center in Jamaica NY will have a brand-new carport canopy over an adjoining asphalt parking lot. The Colegio Santa Gema School in Carolina, Puerto Rico will have roof top solar, and their Holy Family Retreat Center in West Hartford, CT will have a ground array installation a few hundred yards from their buildings.

Fr. Jim adds “Our legacy will include the visual witness that we tried to do something about climate change. The Passionists have now created their own story about acting on our beliefs, a story we hope will only motivate others as well.”