Solar Savings: number of churches with rooftop panels more than doubles in 2018

The number of Sydney Anglican parishes benefiting from solar energy generation has more than doubled in a single year.

From Kiama to Quakers Hill, a total of 16 parishes installed rooftop solar photovoltaic (PV) panels on their church buildings during the 9 months to September 2018. The enthusiastic uptake means that 31 parishes (11 per cent) across the Diocese now have solar panels installed, with a further 30 expressing interest for 2019. (For an interactive map of all 31 parishes click here.)

Solar energy not only represents good environmental practice, but with every dollar saved invested in ministry, it reflects wise financial stewardship too. Solar installations for churches are getting easier and cheaper, with the majority of parish solar projects in 2018 cash flow positive from the beginning. With parishes also able to benefit from federal and state government grants and subsidies, the potential savings are clear.

And it's not just ongoing costs that are reduced. Solar panel installation costs have dropped markedly in the last 3 years due to market pricing and government incentives. As a result, a tipping point has now been reached that makes solar more attractive as an insulation from increasing energy costs. Some parishes have even entered into power purchase agreements (PPAs), whereby there is no upfront cost during a 7-10 year shared cost saving period with the supplier after which time the parish owns the installation outright.

However, government subsidies are gradually being phased out, meaning the window of opportunity to maximise the value of solar installation will start to close. Now is the time to lock in the benefits of solar power for the next 25 years.

A typical parish 10kw rooftop solar panel installation costs around $10,000 and results in immediate savings of more than 20 per cent on the average $5,000 annual parish power bill, though this will vary between parishes. The major benefit is power generation for daytime church activities. This saves on the average grid electricity cost of 25 to 35 cents per kilowatt hour (Kwh). The parish only pays for energy usage in the evening periods and real time monitoring via an online energy usage app is available to identify further cost savings.

The use of batteries for energy storage and usage during evenings is not likely to be feasible for another 3 years or so when technological advances and market demand drive prices down. But, in the meantime, parishes with solar installations can generate income from the sale of excess energy back to the grid, typically paid at a lower rate of 11-15 cents per Kwh. The typical payback period (the time it takes for the initial capital investment to be repaid via energy savings) is now just five years or less! And savings are multiplied dramatically for those parishes that receive grant funding and so don't pay out of pocket.

While a small number of church buildings may not be suitable for solar panels due to steep roofs, shading of roof areas or heritage factors, most parishes should be able to accommodate a solar installation. So why not get more information on how your parish can start saving on its energy bills!

Between looking for the best deal and sourcing funding, transitioning to solar can feel daunting. So you're encouraged to contact your ACPT Regional Manager who can assist in accessing a competitive, obligation free quote for solar panels. With this in place, your parish will be ready to seek grant funding as the opportunity arises.

Has your parish installed solar and not been included on our list? Let us know! The more we know about, the better we can put parishes in contact with each other to share their experiences.